

the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has also become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a major factor in the overall growth of the economy.

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for

JENNIFER ARDIZZONE

*tall Jenny with her silver voice—
a twenty first birthday present,
in most loving memory*

CHAPTER ONE

“ALL the same,” admitted Miss Cockrill, “this Juanita was a remarkable gel.” She paused impressively, looking at them over her coffee cup with elderly, sharp brown eyes. “She lived on a table.”

“On a *table*?”

“She carried a table from somewhere to somewhere and lived on it for the rest of her life.”

“How long was the rest of her life?” said the youngest cousin: Miss Cockrill was Cousin Hat to most of those present.

“She started when she was seventeen. She died when she was about fifty.”

“Presumably from lack of exercise?” suggested her hostess.

There was a lively discussion of the occupational hazards consequent upon living on a table, on the part of the younger cousins frankly indelicate, for the gentlemen had not yet come into the drawing-room. “But how big was the table, Cousin Hat?”

“A large, round, tea-table sort of a table. The top is in a glass shrine in the Cathedral of San Juan, still with some crumbs on it from Juanita’s last meal. It is very highly thought of.”

“It sounds crumbly to me,” said the youngest cousin.

Cousin Hat was not amused. “We should not make mock of other people’s devotions. Besides, the table’s the least part of it. She has a much greater claim to respect on the island than that.” She put down the coffee cup and looked round her once again. “She lived and died a virgin,” she said reverently.

There was a slight hush. Cousin Hat was confidently believed to have lived a virgin, having, according to the younger members anyway, had little alternative; and, at the age of fifty-eight might be supposed likely to die in that condition. “Is there anything extraordinary,” said the hostess at last, “in a girl’s remaining a virgin?”

“Especially on a table,” said the youngest cousin.

“There is if she lives in San Juan,” said Cousin Hat.

Mr Cecil, standing in the doorway, was quite beside himself with excitement. He had, as he did in all matters of gender, delicately compromised, taking one glass of wine with the gentlemen and leaving them to their second while he joined the ladies—thus maintaining his own position somewhere between the two (if the men stayed on for a third, the adjustment was perfect). For a moment

he had been mystified, for Miss Cockrill's pronunciation of the Spanish 'J' was resolutely British, but mention of the table confirmed his first impression. "I do believe you're talking about my San Hoowarne," exclaimed Mr Cecil, giving the aspirate all he had. "My San Hoowame el Pirata! And my Hoowarnita!"

"Do you know San Jewan?" said Miss Cockrill, undismayed.

"But me? But, my dear—one is Cecil: Mr Cecil, you know, of Christophe et Cie." He threw back an ormolu forelock with a famous long white hand. "The Hoowarnese Hipline!" It was self-explanatory.

"Mr Cecil is our great couturier," said the hostess hurriedly.

"Oh, I see," said Cousin Hat. She glanced down with undisturbed complacency at her own confection of non-dating black georgette. "I'm afraid I don't go in very much for hiplines."

"But you must have heard of ...? Duckies!—" implored Mr Cecil, appealing to the ladies, as one who wonders who among all those about him will rid him of this turbulent priest, "Do something!"

The younger guests, delighted, rose in a body and paraded the drawing-room. "Knees bent, you do see?—and bottoms tucked in; skirts slit so that they can just walk—since walk you must, you inconsiderate things!" cried Mr Cecil, playfully self-deprecatory. "There should be frills, of course, but one had to simplify; so we used flat tucks, from the tail down, just symbolical, as it were, of frills...." He paused, exhausted by the wonder of it all. "You really never heard of the Hoowarnese Hip——"

"Or Jewanese Jip——"

"—or J-line?" said the youngest cousin, sitting down with difficulty upon the symbolical frills.

Mr Cecil affected to be vastly amused; but inwardly he was disturbed. Had it come to this, that young persons could be witty at the expense of his Hipline? And if so, might it not be that the time had arrived for a New Idea? Grave portendings: for the young woman who for many years had had Mr Cecil's new ideas, had parted brass rags at last and gone off in a huff. He would have to go back to San Juan this summer and prospect all on his own. Those touching policemen, perhaps, with their calf-length cloaks? "Do I seem to *see* you, duckies, in cloaks and flat hats?"

Miss Cockrill for her part disclaimed. But she too would be going to the island in September: they would doubtless meet there ...?

The fun of it, said Mr Cecil civilly.

With a niece of hers; well, a cousin, really. The cousin had 'discovered' this Juanita and was making a cult of her. "And a good thing too. All unmarried women should have a Cause."

"You're unmarried, Cousin Hat," said the youngest cousin, "and you haven't got a Cause."

"Your Cousin Winsome is my cause," said Cousin Hat. She sighed. "Such a tiresome gel. Really," she said, looking round at the rest with irascible affection, "the most tiresome of the lot."

The cousins broke into a chorus of acquiescence. 'She makes us call her Winsome....' 'When her name's plain Winifred....' 'She calls her car Busy Bee....' 'And talks about her Bootsis Library Book....' 'And she wears beige lace blouses ...' 'And mauve beads, she always has ...' 'Not that it matters any more, now;

she's thirty-eight....'

"An orphan," said Miss Cockrill, explaining to a Cecil already half dead with boredom but socially defenceless from the impact on his sensitive nerves of mauve beads with beige lace. "Had her since she was eighteen. Three or four hundred of her own, that's all, and not the brains of a hare. What could one do? I'd promised her mother—and so I took her on; and which to be the more sorry for, I've never yet decided: her or me."

"You've done all you could to keep her happy, Harriet."

"I've done all I could not to keep her at all," said Cousin Hat. "There isn't a bachelor in Kent I haven't told fibs to about her money; but if a gel will wear lace jabots before her time ..."

"Jabots?" faltered Mr Cecil.

"A sloper," said Miss Cockrill. She shrugged her own meagre shoulders. "Well, she can't help that, poor thing. But why add lace?"

"Oh, but she can help it. I mean ... Well, *nobody* slopes these days. There are—arrangements," said Mr Cecil, colouring, for it was not his favourite subject. He found strength to add, however, that they kept a quite madly good corsetière actually on the premises of Christophe et Cie. If Miss Cockrill would persuade the niece, or was it cousin ...?

"Too late," said Miss Cockrill, in a voice of doom. And besides, none of it mattered any more: for on the island of San Juan el Pirata, Winsome Foley had found her Cause.

CHAPTER TWO

IF San Juan el Pirata has done much for the house of Christophe et Cie, it must also be acknowledged that the Juanese Hipline has contributed to the present prosperity of San Juan; though to claim, as Mr Cecil does, that he ‘put San Juan on the map,’ is to exaggerate grossly. San Juan was already on the map when he found it: both literally and figuratively—lying off the north-west coast of Italy and having a prominent place on the tourist itineraries of all the more enterprising travel bureaux. In an earlier novel,* recounting the events that befell Inspector Cockrill there, several summers before the present narrative (Inspector Cockrill being Cousin Hat’s brother) it has been described as follows:

“The island of San Juan el Pirata lies some twenty kilometres off the coast of Tuscany, about level with the topmost tip of Corsica, in the Ligurian Sea. It is perhaps seven or eight miles across† and largely composed of volcanic upheavals of rock: a republic, self-contained, self-controlled, self-supporting, with a tiny parliament and a tiny police force and a quite remarkably tiny conscience in regard to its obligations to the rest of society: but with a traditionally enormous Hereditary Grand Duke. Juan the Pirate appropriated his foothold there two hundred years ago. Busily plying between Italy and his native Spain, he fell foul of both, established himself on the island, built his rock fortress there, defended it against all comers and, in 1762, retired there, gold-glutted, to die at last in the odour of sanctity, loudly declaring repentance for his abominable sins and in the same breath his right and intention to hang on to the proceeds. Succeeding governments in both Italy and Spain have turned a blind eye, according to temperament or expedience, and to this day San Juan remains—on Italian territory, in Italian seas—Spanish in thought and flavour: still using in highly bastardised form its founder’s mother tongue and strictly upholding and maintaining his deplorable standards. The charming Puerto de Barrequetas, Port of the Little Boats, sends forth its fishing fleet night after moonless night, and in the grey dawn welcomes it back again with its contraband cargo; all hands, including such members of the international anti-smuggling police as have not been out to sea with it, turning-to to help with the unloading. But even so it has proved, since the war, impossible to feed the insatiable maw of the contraband-hungry tourist trade, without recourse to the mainland; and San Juan reluctantly smuggles in, instead of through, the Swiss watches, American nylons, French liqueurs, and Scotch whisky, especially manufactured in Madrid, Naples, and Cairo respectively, for this purpose. These are exhibited in the local shops with

'Smuggled' in large letters on printed cards in various languages: and such is their attraction that, in 1950, under the direct auspices of El Exaltida, the Hereditary Grand Duke, himself, San Juan began work on the Bellomare Hotel."

It will be seen, therefore, that San Juan stood in no urgent need of Mr Cecil's advertisement. Miss Cockrill, determined to go there despite her brother's forebodings—for Inspector Cockrill has a low opinion of all things foreign, and rather especially of all things Juanese—had nevertheless been obliged to use his name, on their visit in the previous summer, to obtain accommodation at the Bellomare Hotel. She had succeeded, however; and it was on this, their first holiday together, that she and Winsome, wandering dutifully round the huge, chill and perfectly hideous cathedral, had met a plump, smiling Juanese lady, clad largely in tight black satin and calling herself simply Innocenta—and for the first time heard all about Juanita.

For this was Innocenta di Perliti—last surviving novice of the order of the Perliti, or Little Pearls, the religious order founded by Juanita and over which she had reigned as abbess until her death, some twenty years earlier.

Juanita has a chapel to herself, of course, in the Cathedral, two demoted saints having been turfed out at the time of her death to make room for her and for her patron, Santa Fina; whose own chapel, over opposite, has been made gay with highly colourful reproductions of the faded Ghirlandaio murals in San Gimignano, of which enchanting, many-towered town, she is patron saint. Innocenta was lighting candles in the chapel when first the three ladies met; bobbing her sketchy genuflexions before Santa Fina—but not, alas! before Juanita. Juanita was not yet entitled to such honours, she regretfully explained: Juanita had no official halo. Candles, yes—at one's own peril, her manner seemed to suggest, Mother Church accepting no responsibility; but there were subtle limits to the respect to be paid to the as yet uncanonised. The table-top, however, hung with its complement of crumbs, upon the great blank, dank red brick wall; and beneath it, clad in a mauve satin dress, her shrunken skull crowned with a tiara of decidedly semi-precious stones, her terrible hands crossed on her mauve satin breast, Juanita herself lay in mummified state in a coffin of glass.

Whatever she may have been in her youth—and the girls of San Juan can hardly help but be lovely, with their clear, olive skins and great, melting, dark brown eyes—Juanita had been, by English standards at least, no beauty by the time she died; small and swarthy, with a considerable moustache and the too short thighs sadly characteristic of the Juanese. Life on a table, moreover, is not conducive to sveltness in the female form, and of her fifty-two years, she had spent thirty-five on her table. A niece of the then Grand Duke, explained Innocenta to the fascinated ladies, she had been brought up by her widowed mother in almost seraglio seclusion in the Palatio; until, in her seventeenth year, she had suddenly developed a pious devotion to Santa Fina, patron saint of San Gimignano, not far from Siena; and, in a vision, had been directed to make a pilgrimage there. Refusing all companionship save that of an aged nurse, she had set off on foot: to return a year later, exhausted and emaciated, staggering beneath the weight of the famous tea-table, which, in obedience to a further vision, she had acquired in San Gimignano and carried all the way back.

"But why?" said Miss Cockrill.

"Senora, this was in honour of Santa Fina."

"Why should it do Santa Fina any good, to spend one's life on a table?"

Innocenta was astonished. She gestured with a dimpled hand at the pseudo-Ghirlandaio murals. "Senora—Santa Fina spent her life on a table too."

"Good God!" said Cousin Hat. She went off into a fit of highly unedifying laughter. "How did *she* take a rival pole-squatter?"

Winsome assumed her most exasperating expression, one of gentle patience. "You haven't been listening, dear. Santa Fina is a mediæval saint, she lived two hundred years ago."

Oh, well, said Cousin Hat, that accounted for it: and one had heard that in those days, the sanitation ...

"... and died when she was thirteen," said Winsome, hastily.

"Lack of exercise. A most unhealthy life for a gel," said Cousin Hat. A year later her hostess was to say the same of Juanita.

But Juanita had not died in what Innocenta called her childcap. Juanita had lived and flourished, had founded an order of nuns, had written many books, many wonderful, wonderful books—she, Innocenta, was struggling even now to translate them into English: very few people on the island knew English, she herself would never have learned it but for the gentlemen: the gentlemen from the Bellomare Hotel, she amplified, though why he or they—it was difficult to decide—should have promoted her English lessons she did not go on to explain. But the books had been translated into Spanish and into Italian, all of them—the Diaries, the slim vols. of pious exhortation, of aspiration, of reflection, of warning, of prayer.... If one lived on a table there was much time for writing, of course, and space too, that was a consideration. She mused over it, shaking her charming head. But the Senoras, she said, suddenly, apologetically, would not be interested in all this, the Senoras, of course, were not of Mother Church, one understood well that in Inghilterra, no one was Catholica....

Winsome Foley could not let that pass. It all depended. For, after all, she cried, clasping her narrow hands on the beige lace slopes, after all—what did the word 'catholic' mean? It meant, did it not?—'universal.' And perhaps even they, poor benighted heathen from Inghilterra, suggested Winsome, delicately teasing, tenderly ironic with the poor little bigoted creature, perhaps even they might claim to be members of the one great 'universal' Christian church?—with varying ideas and observances, perhaps, but all happy children together in the same family....

Winsome Foley was what Mr Cecil would have called Madly High. If the College of Cardinals would but have promoted a Britisher to the Papal Throne, even only once in a while for decency's sake, she might well, she sometimes thought, have joined hands with the Scarlet Woman herself; reserving perhaps a few private judgements on such matters as the Resurrection of the Dead (a horrid and confusing business), the Miracle of the Mass, and—even in the case of an Englishman—the Infallibility of the Pope. But to owe allegiance to a God content to be represented here below by a foreigner was, and must remain, unthinkable to any member of a family whose men had for so many generations conducted themselves as officers and for the most part gentlemen, in the dear Indian Civil. She had therefore evolved for herself a happy mean between Canterbury and Rome, much as Mr Cecil had, in his case perforce, between the sexes, and in

roughly the same proportion; and pursued a pious course which she referred to as My Little Garden Path to Heaven, likening her good deeds to flowers and her bad to weeds, and labouring assiduously among them both with the trugs and trowels of an ardent spiritual life. Confident in her own conclusions, she rejected communion with any one branch of the saints, and worshipped in this Church or that as the winds of her garden listed: seeking the sacraments in the spirit of an informed psychotic receiving professional attention, unflagging in early morning devotion to a Mass which she held to be meaningless, and consistent only in seeking religion where religion had artistic appeal—reeling happily home to breakfast day after day, suffocated with incense, dazed by dead language, continually reconcussed by the violence of her genuflections, and all in homage to what she believed to be nothing but a small round piece of bread. That Winsome, who had, baptismally speaking, never left the Church of England, should carry a torch ignited in the fires of Rome, seemed to herself no incongruity at all; and, had she but known it, such a torch was at this moment being thrust into the embers, all ready to be passed, joyfully sparking, into her eager hand. Winsome Foley was about to adopt her Cause.

Perhaps it was some prerecognition, however, that prompted her to continue with Innocenta when they left the Cathedral. Miss Cockrill, worn out with sightseeing, took her aching feet and stiff neck back to the Bellomare; but Winsome walked up with Innocenta in the soft evening air to the top of the ridge that marks the last outskirts of San Juan's one little town: and there, on a bank, they rested, looking down on to the lovely Toscanita plain with its drift of silvery olives, and to a pink-washed building enclosed by a winding wall. Innocenta pointed it out with loving pride. "E casa mea."

Winsome was astonished. The place had been shown to her before, but as the convent where Juanita had spent the last—or table—years of her life: La Colombaia, it was called, apparently, 'the dovecote,' she thought that was so charming! There was another 'dovecote' down in the town itself, she had seen the name up over the door, 'Colombaia' and a pretty girl, not yet attained to religious habit, looking out of an upper window: a pious people—all Catholics of course, and every family, no doubt, had one daughter a nun. "I understood this was the convent? Is it not La Colombaia?"

Si, si, agreed Innocenta. A Colombaia. No more a convenuto, she said sadly, now that El Margherita was gone.

"El Margherita is another name for Juanita?"

Ah, the good one, the blessed one, said Innocenta, fondly.

"Why was she called El Margherita?"

"The name of her, Seniorita, was di Perli, Juanita di Perli. Perli are pearls; and margherita also is a pearl—you know, Seniorita, our language is much mixing with Spanish and Italian, the two. So she is called El Margherita, the Pearl of San Juan; and her nuns they were called by the people here Le Perliti, the Little Pearls of Santa Fina. This is pretty, Seniorita, si?"

Very pretty, quite, quite charming. "And here," said Winsome, catching the infection, throwing out a long, white knuckley hand, "was their oyster shell?"

This flight of fancy, however, was too much for Innocenta's English. "E Colombaia. No more now el convenuto, no more Perliti. It is I, Seniorita, who

have the Colombaia." She lived there, as far as Winsome could make out with half a dozen lovely daughters; no mention of a Mr Innocenta, but still—these foreigners! thought Winsome with a liberal sigh....

"The house was given to me, *Senorita*, in el *testamento*."

"The will?"

"El *testamento* d'el *Margherita*."

"In the will of ...? Do you mean," said Winsome, quite excited, "that you actually *knew* her?"

Knew her? Knew Juanita? But of course—who had not known Juanita?—who, after all, was but twenty years dead, who for thirty years before that, had (with unflagging spiritual complacency) guided the lives of all the good people of San Juan. As for Innocenta, her heir—no, she had been no relation. The *Senorita* did not know, perhaps, the meaning of her name?—did not know that in San Juan, as in Italy, an 'innocento' meant an orphan?

For Innocenta was what her name proclaimed her to be—fatherless, nameless, orphaned by the death of a single parent; one of the countless 'innocenti' of an island where youth is universally beautiful—where love is happy and easy and not really very severely frowned upon. Juanita, finding the number of applications to enter her sisterhood, after the first flush, somewhat disappointing, had in her later years conceived the simple plan of recruiting their number from the flourishing *Barrequitas* orphanage; and Innocenta had, almost in childcap, she explained, been taken into the convent with several others so chosen, and there brought up to an almost inevitable acceptance of the religious habit when the time should come. But the time, alas! had never come: not for Innocenta. Juanita had died; and somehow—somehow, said Innocenta wistfully, somehow all the young ones had slipped away and soon, as the old nuns died off, there was no one left. So that now there were no *Perliti*: only the Colombaia. "E *triste*?"

"*Molto triste*," agreed Winsome. Curiosity, however, struggled with sensibility. There was, for example, the matter of the lovely daughters. "And you too—er—relaxed your vows?"

Innocenta was shocked. Her vows!—no, no, indeed, had she not explained to the *Senorita* that by the time Juanita died, one had not yet even left the noviceship....? She had taken no vows; she had been a young girl serving her apprenticeship, that was all.

"You didn't go on and take them?"

"*Senorita*, I was very young. The *Badessa* sent for me, she said that I would have a long religious life before me, but soon they would all be gone and I should be alone. This was the *Badessa* who was made after Juanita died. She was old and very wise."

"There is another Colombaia in the town? Could you not have gone there?"

Innocenta looked oddly offended; it was one thing, she said, to be mistress of ... The *Senorita* would not imagine ...? She broke off, troubled and even a little haughty for one so plump and sweetly smiling. Evidently, pride of possession had somewhat gone to Innocenta's charming head. Winsome hastened to revert to it. "Of course you would remain! The whole *convenuto* was bequeathed to you?"

Innocenta, placated, explained. It was the custom in many religious houses in those days, in all parts of the world, to leave property to the youngest member of

the novitiate, thus avoiding death duties and other like taxes. When the last of the old nuns had died, it had been found that Juanita's possessions were still in Innocenta's name. She had applied to El Exaltada—the father of the present Hereditary Grand Duke—and he had said that she could make good use of the house and had better keep it.... (Evidently, thought Winsome, the daughters had already been in existence and housing them a necessity.)

But what she could not understand, she said, was why the convento had ever closed?

The convento had closed, in fact, because its original purpose no longer existed. Juanita, arriving back from San Gimignano, a skeleton of her former robust young self, carrying a large, round tea-table and already self-proclaimed mystic and visionary, had had to be accommodated somewhere. The apartments in the Palatio had seemed to the Grand Duke, her uncle, no longer practicable—the widowed mother most heartily agreeing, for embryo saints are uncomfortable bedfellows and La Contessa di Perli, though devout, had no exaggerated taste for asceticism. What to do then? The old nurse had died, it seemed, inconsiderately but perhaps not very astonishingly, on the way home: worn out, murmured the cynical, but in very low tones, for it is dangerous work on the island to criticise the relatives of the Grand Duke, by an over-generous share in the honour of carrying the table. It had ended in his purchasing for his niece the freehold of the pink-washed farmhouse, the owner having received a pressing invitation from the Palace to find himself suddenly obliged to part with it; and in an invitation, also in terms exceedingly hard to refuse, to certain widows and unmarried ladies, to enclose themselves with his niece behind its walls. Since the almost entire function of the order had been to run errands for a dominating female who refused to budge from a table, it is hardly surprising that the community remained small in numbers, however ardent it may have been in spirit; and Juanita's own press-gang methods in co-operating exploitable innocenti, occurred to her too late to save the order when, too soon, she died. Within ten years of that day, the last of the Grand Duke's conscripts had gone to join their beloved foundress in heaven: the flourishing novice-ship of the last year or two had all dribbled away; and there remained only one loving and simple heart to remember and to dream....

It was Innocenta's dream to see her saint's cause recognised in Rome: Beata Juanita, Santa Juanita at last—to see her order flourish once again, to return the convento to its true purpose, to be once more the humblest of Juanita's Perliiti, spending the long days of devotion and quietness within the enclosing walls. What happiness, said Innocenta, perched on the flowering bank, swinging her plumply bulging patent leather shoes, what happiness in one's last years, to renounce all the bustle and fret of the world and give oneself over—since work we all must—to working only for God....!

Winsome's narrow hands clasped themselves together till the knuckles shone, in her folk-weave lap. What happiness, indeed! She looked down at the pink-sprawled house, at the winding wall, at the terraces that fell away and away in flower and fruit and vine to the plain below, at the sequined sea and the shimmering blue of the sky. What happiness! To spend all one's days in contemplation here: a little church embroidery, an hour of ecstasy in a tiny chapel, an hour again in the cool of the evening, tending a garden of flowers

dedicated to God.... Abbess, at last, perhaps, beloved of all, respected of all, walking with gentle dignity, rosary in hand, through her dovecote of merry-eyed, simple-hearted saints....

But all this could be of no interest to the Senorita, Innocenta suggested, scything in upon this weedy uprush of spiritual pride along the Little Garden Path; one understood well that in Inghilterra there were no convenutos, no colombaias....

"Oh, but nonsense," said Winsome, rushing once again to defence of benighted England. "We have many colombaias, lots of them; of both religions, Roman Catholic and Anglican."

Well, well, said Innocenta, much interested; she had always been informed quite otherwise. And of different religions, too, how very odd! Here, of course, everyone was Catholica, that was the end of it. But she was surprised. The Church in England, one had always heard, was very narrow, quite, quite opposed to ...

"No, no, of course not," said Winsome again. "We have lots of them; not so many as the Catholics perhaps, but several. I was in one myself, a very well-known one."

Well, fancy, said Innocenta.

"From the age of sixteen onwards. I was 'finished' there."

"Finito?" said Innocenta. She sighed and shrugged: too bad, her plump shoulders seemed to say, but that was life.

Winsome struggled to explain. "I mean I went there to complete my education: many of our girls in England do, for a year or two...."

"E vere?" said Innocenta.

"To teach us to—well, to become young ladies, to grow from childhood to womanhood...."

Well, certainly, said Innocenta, doubtfully, there could be no surer way. And for girls of different religions, too: a most delicate distinction. "La Colombaia Catholica! La Colombaia Anglica! E singulare!"

"And so you see, I am *most* interested in your plans for turning this lovely building back into a convento. The trouble, I suppose ...?"

The trouble, acknowledged Innocenta at once, was a very usual one—there was no money. The present Grand Duke was satisfied with the present state of affairs, he said the Colombaia was filling a need and, said Innocenta lowering her voice though there was no one within a mile of them, he was strangely opposed to many Observances, all the island knew it, though few dared mention it aloud. In the matter of the Canonisation, for example ...

"Of El Margherita?"

Not even a mere 'Beata,' said Innocenta: and was it not well known that the Arcivescovo had long, long been eager to apply to Rome; that the affair would have been settled to the happiness and profit of all, had not El Exaltida.... Well, well: it was not wise to speak of it. The very vines had ears in San Juan el Pirata. And meanwhile ... She dived her fat brown hand into her fat red plastic handbag and produced a very fat little old, black book. Meanwhile she could get on with the Diary.

"The Diary?"

Juanita's Diary. The Senorita would have heard, must have heard of the

Diaries of El Margherita?—they had been translated into Spanish, into Italian ...

“But not into English?”

Not into English. And now there were many tourists, British and American, coming to the island, there would be a great demand for the books, a great sale for the books when money for the *convenuto* was so sorely needed; and here was she, Innocenta, one of the very few of the island who could speak both languages. She tenderly unfolded her treasure from its silken wrappings and for the first time Winsome held the little black book in her hands.

‘In my youth,’ writes Juanita complacently, opening the first page of her diary with a bang, ‘I was very beautiful. My uncle, the Grand Duke, delighted to load me with jewels and beautiful clothes, I bathed in scented waters and spent all my days in dancing, which was my delight. But from the hour of my Vision, I cared no more for these distractions.’ The first part has, as it happens, been crossed out and altered, but the sentiment remains the same: ‘In my youth I delighted in ornament and beautiful clothes ...’ or, as Innocenta’s translation has it, ‘While a young fowl* I was happy for adorning and fine cloths; but from the time of my Arrivalment† I was no more thinking of these excitings.’

There is a good deal of deletion in these early pages of Juanita’s diaries, executed before the gentle flow of fiction-writing came to her as readily as it did in later years. Innocenta had spent much time in trying to read behind the heavy scorings that blotted out the first, unconsidered outpourings of her saint: success, however, had revealed one or two contradictions so startling that she came at last to a habit of adding further scribbles of her own, lest anyone else should decipher what lay beneath. After all, Juanita knew best. She would undoubtedly have said so herself, reflected Innocenta, a tiny bit ruefully for one so habitually happy to accept and be pleased, thinking back to those old, austere days in the novice-ship of the *convenuto*, when, from her table, El Margherita had laid about her with implacable self-esteem: would it not be wisest to let her know best to the end? ‘My attachment to Santa Fina dates from the year of my Vision,’ for example. Juanita had scored it out and written instead, ‘from my earliest childhood.’ Very well, then: what business of Innocenta’s if she chose to lay claim to an extra decade of devotion? “Her adhesion to Santa Fina was from first times of childcap,” she said stoutly to the *Senorita*, pointing it out.

“Or shall we say, rather, ‘from the days when I was a tiny child?’” suggested Winsome: and with the very words there rose in her mind’s eye, an Arrivalment all of her own—a vision of a book, gilt-edged, in a binding, perhaps, of mother-of-pearl, palely iridescent: The Diary of Juanita, Pearl of San Juan. ‘Translation by ...’ There would have to be an Acknowledgement, of course, ‘with the assistance of’ or ‘in collaboration with’; but, for the rest, ‘Translation by’—and, in letters of gold, a facsimile perhaps of her signature—her own name: Winsome S. Foley. The Diary, all the Diaries; the slim vols., the books of prayers, the pieties, the (execrable) verse.... Juanita, to be canonised one day, a new star rising in the firmament of the sanctified: and, she, Winsome S. Foley, sole link between the saint and the English-speaking world. The Collected Works of Juanita di Perli, translated by Winsome S. Foley, (with acknowledgements ...) One would have to learn Juanese, of course; and there would be Forewords, trips to the British Museum to look up figures and facts, a subscription to the London Library to

delve for details of island history. And a Life! Under the aegis of the Grand Duke (who, after all was a friend of her cousin, the Inspector). The Life of El Margherita: by Winsome S. Foley—this time without acknowledgements, unless a gracefully turned compliment to the kindness of Lorenzo, Hereditary Grand Duke of San Juan el Pirata, would look well....?

Winsome S. Foley had found her Cause at last.

* *Tour de Force.*

† *Author's Note:* This is not quite correct: the island has in fact an area of nearly thirty square miles, including the plain of Toscanita or 'Little Tuscany' on its Western side.

* Presumably from the Spanish/Italian, *pollo*—a hen, and Spanish (fam.), *pollo*—a youth.

† Query from *vision—visitation—arrival*: the Vision is referred to throughout the translations as The Arrivament.

CHAPTER THREE

THE island of San Juan el Pirata seen from the deck of the gay little

vaporetto which plies between Barrequitas and Piombino on the mainland, looks like an outsize cathedral, rising abruptly up out of the sea. Perched fantastically at the tip of its spire, is the fairy-tale palace of the Grand Duke. To the west, built up from the sheer rock face, is the prison—a dark, dank old fortress where, in the splendid old piratical days, a countless toll of prisoners mouldered into merciful death; balancing it to the east is the Duomo, which houses the illustrious bones of the founder, and to the north the cobbled streets thrust their way down to the quays of the fishing boats. But looking southward over the sunlit blue sea starred with a dozen tiny satellite islands, what would be the façade of the cathedral slopes down, crumbling and pine-clad, to an indentation of little bays; and here, above many-flowered terraces, stand the long lines of the Bellomare Hotel, whose boast it is that every room faces into the sunshine and over the sea....’

Mr Cecil crossed by the vaporetto on the same day, as it happened, as Miss Cockrill and her cousin, late in the September after the dinner party at which he had met Cousin Hat. He saw them standing together at the rails—a small, thin—and yet oddly sturdy—little woman in a shapeless linen dress and a flat round hat which looked as if it had once been high and curvacious and generously wreathed, but had been painstakingly reduced, by some steam-roller method, to its present indeterminate amalgamation of flowers and straw: the typical ‘shady hat’ in fact, of the elderly Englishwoman abroad; and a younger woman of the type, reflected Mr Cecil, that it was quite impossible to ‘dress’—the droopy type, long drooping back that looked not strong enough to support the height—a standard rose, as it were, without proper staking: long, yearning face, long nose, long narrow hands and feet—long skirt, alas! of madly unfashionable length, jutting out in ill-considered gores, like a cardboard bell. Winsome on her earlier visit had fallen in love with Juanese folk-weave and taken home yards of it to be made up by a clever little woman she had found in Sittingbourne, to her own designs. She, too, wore a straw hat, wreathed with (of course) wild flowers; and the mauve beads. But she wore on the ring-finger of her right hand, a very beautiful opal. He saw his friend Tomaso’s eyes light up as they noticed it. Tomaso was the finest goldsmith in Barrequitas, he owned the Joyeria there, the jeweller’s shop, now that his father, dear old Pedro di Goya, was dead. After a while, Mr Cecil saw that he was manœuvring to speak to the owner of the ring. Tomaso loved all lovely things.

On this occasion the rooms had been ordered well in advance and the ladies found themselves admirably accommodated, looking out, as promised, over the terraced gardens and down to the sea. Mr Cecil arrived unheralded; but Mr Cecil, of course, is a law unto himself on the island of San Juan. He said as much as he made his way that evening, passing easily among the hotel guests sitting sipping Juanellos on the pebble-patterned terrace under the twisted grey wistaria boughs; stopping for a word here, a word there, in his high, gay voice, a slightly battered, middle-ageing popinjay, with the ormolu forelock and fluttering hands carefully cultivated for the benefit of admiring ladies in the world of haute couture (for Mr Cecil's exaggerations are by no means without calculation, and conceal a good, hard, not un-cynical business head); and the dear little paunch, *not* part of the deliberate décor, but which slappings and pummellings and foam-bathings galore, alas! fail to keep down. He was at the moment rehearsing a new fashion in the impromptu mannerisms for which he is, and justly, famous: soon all London would be talking Restorationese and adding (so good for publicity!) 'as Mr Cecil would say.' "Oh, la!" cried Mr Cecil, therefore, stepping lively and at ease among the hotel guests, "One is vastly more wise not to book." Just turn up unannounced, he insisted, and they thought one *must* be a Vip, and two poor members of some wretched Grouppa were doubled up, to give one the best room. "But then, of course," he would add, at the same time delicately poking fun at his hosts and advertising his own identity, "one is their 'Meethter Thetheelah'—the Juanese Hipline, you know: 'Creethtophe et Thee.'" Short of distributing hand-outs, it cannot be said that Mr Cecil ever misses a chance of promoting Christophe et Cie.

Miss Cockrill strolled down next morning to the quay, in search of the Gerente de Politio, charged with messages from her brother, the Inspector. She found him there, sure enough. In his flat, black-mackintoshy circular hat, cracked across the back and turned up flat against the crown, protected from the strong sunshine by his flowing, calf-length cloak of midnight blue, he was padding up and down on dirty bare feet, superintending the unloading of a cargo of contraband. He greeted her with exuberance, enquiring most animatedly after his dear friend and brother policeman from Scotalanda Yarrdda; but his brow was black and his eyes wore an anxious frown, and he suddenly asked abruptly: "Senorita Cockereel—in Inghil-terra, it is not the habit to take snuff?"

Cousin Hat had, as in duty bound, aided Winsome in her researches into the Juanese tongue during the year of their absence from the island, which had been largely spent in work upon the Diaries; but her familiarity with the language did not rise to such heights as these. The Gerente raised a large, dirty thumb, poked imaginary powder up his nostril, and vigorously sneezed. "Oh—snuff," said Miss Cockrill. "Well—on the whole—no."

"Nobody takes snuff?"

"Only artists and people. A grubby habit," said Cousin Hat.

Only artists. And in San Juan, said the Gerente, not even artists. The tabacca, yes. The tabacca da fiuto—no. And yet ... He drew her aside and away from the toiling throng, dived into a pocket and, discarding several packages of habit-forming drugs and a small box of dubious diamonds, showed something that lay like a frost-flower in his great, dirty palm. "Senorita—look at this!"

It was a box, a tiny box of crystal and gold, with a design on its lid of a

marguerite, set in pearls. Attached to it was a label, saying quite simply: SMUGLED. It was engraved 'Mad in San Juan.'

Miss Cockrill recognised it immediately. "That's Tomaso di Goya's work."

"Tomaso!" said the Gerente gloomily.

"He had some in his shop last year, only they were larger, they were cigarette-cases. He was selling them like hot cakes; I bought one myself, for a present."

"Cigarette-cases. But this," said the Gerente, "is not a cigarette-case?"

"Well, no," said Miss Cockrill. She held the pretty thing in her own small, square hand. "Ah, yes, now I see—a snuff-box?"

"A snuff-box.! This is what Tomaso now says: 'We can call it a snuff-box.' But nobody on the island of San Juan takes snuff: and in Inghilterra, in America, in all the countries of the turisti, Senorita—they do not take snuff."

"So how are you to sell the snuff-box?" prompted Miss Cockrill.

"How are we to sell five thousand snuff-boxes, Senorita?—five thousand, ten thousand, for all we know—we have not yet finished unloading the boxes." And he snatched the pretty thing suddenly from her open hand and flung it with all his might away from him. Its flight through the air made an iridescent rainbow, it fell all a-shimmer in the sunshine to sink between the close-packed prows of the boats, into the dirty water that lapped the quay.

The Gerente de Politio had grown rich of recent years. The smuggling world must pay bribes to him; but he need pay no bribes—indeed there came a time, he had long ago confided to his friend, Inspector Cockrill, when one must decide between buying up the boats and owning them or collecting the bribes from those who did. Others of his wealth would long ago have retired—why work when one might be free to drowse away the rest of life in the Juanese sunshine over a glass of arguadiente and a handful of fat green olives from the Toscanita plain? But he, the Gerente, had many daughters, he could not afford to retire—and to give up one's post as head of the police meant, of course, that the bribes fell away to almost nothing, leaving one with no income but a little desultory blackmail, that dwindled as one's old friends and henchmen died off; for to keep on the boats after one had left the police, would mean paying bribes in one's turn, let alone blackmail, and it simply was not, financially speaking, a proposition. So he remained in harness and prospered and grew rich; but not rich enough, surely, thought the scandalised Miss Cockrill, to toss into the harbour a trinket of crystal and gold. "Well—that was a splendid gesture, Gerente. But expensive."

The Gerente did not answer. He selected a silver-chased rifle of blunderbuss design from a heap of similar weapons stacked, hay-wise, on the quay, barked a few angry instructions to his men and, shuffling his feet into the filthy white sandshoes which he wore when on duty, took Miss Cockrill respectfully by her skinny arm and marched her off up the hill. "You come with me, Senorita, I pray, and we speak with Tomaso." If, he added coldly, Tomaso had not already cut his throat; though in that case, before the day was out he, the Gerente, would probably do it for him.

"But not before me," said Cousin Hat. "I dislike the sight of blood."

The single street of Barrequitas runs like a rivulet, cobble-bedded, down from the Toscanita ridge, to the quay; and under its sunless banks crouch the little shops, brilliant with colour—white cheeses, the local pottery from the red earth,

turquoise and green and scarlet summer cottons, the tawny yellow and blue-black bloom of grapes.... Half-way up is the goldsmith's shop, the Joyeria, a shadowy Rembrandt thrust through with Rembrandt flashes of jewels and gold. From out of its chiaroscuro of shade, Tomaso came forward to meet them, a gipsy figure with sly black eyes and the hands of a craftsman, scarred and brown. "Ah, Senorita, happily to see you, yesterday we spoke upon the vaporetto and last year you were most graciously coming to my shop...." He exhausted himself in self-congratulation on the Senorita's return visit, but he too wore a very anxious frown; and, dragging forward a chair for her, he put the question that was uppermost in his mind. "Senorita, in Inghilterra——"

"In Inghilterra, do they take snuff?" said the Gerente. "I have asked already. No, they do not."

Tomaso opened the shop's great safe by the simple expedient of tugging at the handle, and took from among its contents a bottle of arguadiante and three glasses. They sat over the polished counter, their elbows propped in a welter of brooches and bracelets and rings, enamelled boxes, carved jade figurines, tassels of pearls strung on short lengths of silken thread. "It is no use, Tomaso. We have ten thousand snuff-boxes and no market for them at all."

Tomaso shrugged and grimaced, throwing out expostulatory hands. "Was it I, Guido Bussaca, who mixed up 'fiume' with 'fiuto'?"

"Was it I who wrote down the measurements all wrong?"

"Was it I who tore up the paper and decided to 'remember'?"

"Was it I who created the smugglers' rule, 'Nothing written down'?"

"Was it I——? But what use to accuse one another, Guido? A catastrophe has happened: it will not mend it to decide who was at fault."

"Quite right. Stop quarrelling," said Miss Cockrill, just as though she were Cousin Hat and back among the nieces, "and tell me what is the matter."

The matter was, of course, that El Gerente and Tomaso had gone into business together; and had come unstuck. "The cigarette-cases, Senorita. Tomaso did well with them last year, the year before. The emblem of El Margherita on the lid, this was an attraction...."

"No emblem," said Tomaso sulkily. "A flower. A pretty design, that was all."

"Very well, very well—a pretty design. Tomaso is a pagan, Senorita, an agnostic, the name of Mother Church is to him as the red cloak of the matador to the bull. At any rate—they sold. They sold for five gold pesselire apiece. This was good?"

"Very good," said Miss Cockrill, sourly. She herself had paid six pesselire in Tomaso's shop.

"A profit of three pesselire," said Tomaso happily, unaware of this check.

"But Senorita, this is expensive, not so many can buy. Therefore, I say to Tomaso, or Tomaso to me, 'Let us have these boxes made cheaply in Tangiers.' In Naples, Senorita, there is a certain type of glass that will do very well for cut crystal, in Catalonia they make solid pearls from old fish-skins, charmingly iridescent; here in San Juan, Tomaso himself turns out a metal that you could not tell from gold. And in Tangiers there are cheap factories, there is a certain el Hamid, who can turn out such things to a miracle, a hundred at a time...."

"I see," said Miss Cockrill, remembering back to the legend, 'Mad in San Juan,' engraved on the box.

"And all this is very good business, *Senorita*. For this glass must be carried to Tangiers from Naples, these pearls from Barcelona, from San Juan itself, this gold." The Gerente bent his large brown face to peer into hers. "You see?"

"Oh, certainly," said Miss Cockrill. "You have ships."

"A fleet of ships, *Senorita*—a smuggling fleet."

"I see," said Cousin Hat again.

"And so, *Senorita*—a 'Senor Guido' of San Juan places an order with el Hamid in Tangiers for the boxes, specifying this glass, these pearls, that gold. And—Tomaso must produce the gold: and to el Hamid his price is high, my boats must carry the goods: and to el Hamid my price is high. So our profit, *Senorita*, is doubly great." He eyed her with a knowing but quizzical air.

"Except that, unless he is a fool," said Cousin Hat, "el Hamid will raise the price of the boxes to cover the high cost of the transport and the gold."

Tomaso and El Gerente shook their heads in wonder. You couldn't put anything across the *Senorita*, that was clear. However, they themselves had not been at a loss. "True, *Senorita*, when the estimate came from el Hamid, it was very high. So Tomaso and I devised a plan. The price was accepted, the gold was sent, the glass and the pearls delivered, we took our money—for in the smuggling world, *Senorita*, one pays in cash. In Tangiers the boxes are made, are packed, el Hamid is ready for shipping. But—where are the ships? Here at home, 'Senor Guido' grows impatient, he sends messages to Tangiers demanding delivery; but in Tangiers they are now having trouble with the Capitano of the smuggling fleet. My Capitano 'smells danger,' he hints at treachery, he will not sail. No other Capitano will touch the goods, for between smugglers such arrangements are, of course, a matter of honour. So el Hamid frets and threatens; from 'Senor Guido' come messages—he will wait no longer, already he had lost business, he refuses to accept delivery, he will not pay. El Hamid grows desperate with a cargo of glass boxes on his hands, he lowers the price to 'Senor Guido,' he raises the price he will pay to my Capitano. But we are patient, we wait, we play our fish ever a little more and a little more...." He shrugged ruefully, sadly anticipating the ending of his story. "After all, *Senorita*—this was sound, we would have been foolish to give in too soon?" The *Senorita*, who had shown such financial genius in her grasp of the fundamental error in their earlier calculations, would clearly appreciate that.

"Strategically speaking," said Miss Cockrill, not otherwise committing herself, "perfectly sound."

"And yet ... The hour comes, *Senorita*, the tourist season is at hand, we must have our boxes, we can haggle no longer. 'Senor Guido' at last succumbs: at a much reduced price, of course—he will accept the boxes. And then, *Senorita*, can you imagine the perfidy of these Moroccans?—el Hamid refuses to deliver. He has changed his mind, he has found another purchaser for the boxes, he cannot accept our price. Now it is our turn to bargain, for the season is upon us, the touristi flock into the island, Tomaso has concentrated his business on these boxes, he is already short of goods to sell...." He shrugged again, his great shoulders bruising his ears in the extremity of despair. "*Senorita*—it is now September. The season of the touristi is nearly over. And today—*today*—at the price that first we made with that robber, el Hamid, paid cash down in Tangiers before my cargo was allowed to sail: today there arrive five thousand—snuff-

boxes!" He plunged his bare brown elbows into the heaped trincum-trankums on the counter and buried his face in his hands.

Miss Cockrill maintained a one-minute's silence in respect for departed illusions. It was clear that El Gerente's faith in human nature was sadly shattered. She suggested at last: "Couldn't some other use be found for the boxes? In England, women often carry a little box like that in their handbags—for pills, aspirin, dieting rubbish, that sort of thing."

"Senorita, in a fortnight the last of the touristi Inghlesi will be gone. For eight months more, there will be no one. And meanwhile," said Tomaso, "I have to live."

El Gerente obviously knew the answer to that one; but he controlled himself and only said brokenly that he had many daughters. "And my Pepita, also."

"And there is my Loreнна."

"Loreнна!" said El Gerente contemptuously.

"Ah! 'Loreнна' you say; but I tell you, Gerente, something must be done about this girl. She will do herself a mischief," said Tomaso complacently, "if I break with her now. She is mad with love, poor thing."

"She has her work."

"Since she knew me, she is not happy in her work. Innocenta is kind, but she cannot keep for ever a girl who does nothing but cry. It is fortunate at least that it comes at the end of the season...."

"Well, well," said the Gerente impatiently, "we cannot trouble ourselves now with affairs of the heart. The snuffboxes must be sold if you are to eat, Tomaso, if Pepita and I and our children are to eat; and since there will be no touristi, how shall we sell them, here in San Juan?"

"The answer to that is simple," said Tomaso. He sloshed arguadiente into the little glasses, the bottle smooth, with shifting green shadows, in his scarred brown hand. "We shall not."

"Unless," insisted Cousin Hat, "you can think of some use for them." She tried again. "The boxes have El Margherita's emblem on them—whether Tomaso calls it that or not. Aren't there such things as 'reliquaries'? All those crumbs, for example, from Juanita's table ...?"

"Crumbs!" said Tomaso, derisively snorting.

"They're good enough for a glass case in the cathedral."

The idea of a sanctified crumb in a reliquary was not without its appeal. "But Senorita," said the Gerente, regretfully, "it is twenty years since Juanita died. Her last crumbs, true, are in the Duomo; the rest will surely by now have been swept away?"

On the other hand, said Tomaso, brightening a little, crumbs are not difficult to come by.

"You would not ...?" The Gerente was genuinely shocked. "No, no, Tomaso, this I do not permit." Besides, he said, relapsing into gloom, who, after all, would pay tourist prices for a box with one of Juanita's crumbs? And suspect crumbs at that.

"There must be other relics too," said Miss Cockrill. "They must be small, of course, to go into the boxes. But—pieces of things: splinters of the table of course would be perfection, but the table's in the Duomo."

"There are other tables," said Tomaso again. Or, he added hastily, catching El

Gerente's scandalised eye, there were many things she had used, stacked away up at the Colombaia by Innocenta's reverent hands; Lorenna had seen them—cups and plates that might be broken into little pieces, linen that could be cut into fragments, a shred in each box; silver spoons and forks—let him but have the melting down, said Tomaso, a gleam in his eye, of Juanita's table silver, and what an infinity of tiny relics he would fashion, just fit to repose on a nest of cotton-wool, each in its crystal box! It was extraordinary, he assured them limpidly, how much silver could be produced by melting down just one spoon or just one fork.

"Innocenta will ask a great price for the relics," said the Gerente. "She drives a hard bargain. It is all for her 'convenuto,' indeed, but that does not help us." High hope was rising in him nevertheless. "Could we scrape up enough, Tomaso, for just one? For a fork, say, to begin with?"

"A fork! She will give us a fork. What price can she hope to get for a fork of Juanita's? If they would have fetched anything, she would have sold them long ago—'for the convenuto.'"

"She is keeping them, no doubt until the canonisation. When El Margherita is 'Santa Juanita'—then the value of these things will be incalculable."

"Very well, but she is not Santa Juanita now, she is an ugly old woman who made everyone's life a hell by living on a table. So I say that until she is canonised, a spoon or a fork is valueless to Innocenta."

"In that case," said Miss Cockrill, "little bits of them will be valueless to *you*."

Tomaso and El Gerente were struck of a heap again at the extraordinary business acumen of Cousin Hat. It almost seemed that they were compensated for their disappointment by the privilege of witnessing her powers in action. "It is true, *Senorita*. Let but Juanita be even Beatified...."

"Let but the Grand Duke do his duty, you mean," said Tomaso, "and apply to Rome...."

The Gerente went as white as his sun-tanned skin would allow him. "Tomaso, per Dios, do not speak these things aloud!"

"There is no one to hear," said Tomaso, impatiently. "Do you think I have spies among the silver and gold in my safe? I say that the Grand Duke fails in his duty—and knows what he is about. He knows that the canonisation would bring profit for all to San Juan, he knows—too well for his peace of mind—what that would mean: the end of poverty and patience in San Juan, a people rich and strong, and intolerant of the yoke of the palace heavy on their necks; a people free to pause a little in the business of earning their living and educate themselves to a point where they recognise the hand of a tyrant pressing and squeezing down upon their little lives.... A people sick of paying taxes for the upkeep of a French harlot too vain of her figure to give San Juan an heir...."

"Good gracious, *Senor Tomaso*," said Cousin Hat, "you should be in Hyde Park!"

Tomaso laid his hand upon his gaily embroidered heart. "I thank you, *Senorita*." He evidently supposed Hyde Park synonymous with the House of Lords.

"The *Senorita* will not repeat what she has heard?" said the Gerente anxiously, "Tomaso is a spirit of contradiction he has travelled widely, *Senorita*, he has been abroad——"

“Siena—Rome—Naples!” said Tomaso, nonchalantly magnificent. After all, it is two hundred miles to Naples, if not more.

“—and brought back new ideas. Tomaso is against the Grand Duke, he is against La Bellissima, against the Patriarca....”

“I care nothing for the Grand Duke *or* the Grand Duchess,” said Tomaso, impatiently; “I am against not the tyrant but the tyranny. I care nothing for the Patriarch; I am against the use of power through superstition and ignorance. I say, let this old woman be canonised and wealth would come to San Juan and all would be well; and I say that you and I, Gerente—you with your men behind you, I with my knowledge and experience gained on my travels....”

But the Gerente was rocking back and forth, his head in his hands. “For God’s sake, Tomaso, speak no more of this! Senorita, hear nothing, remember nothing, he is mad, he speaks in jest, pay no heed to him.” He leapt to his feet. “Come, Senorita, I conduct you to your hotel.”

“Very well,” said Miss Cockrill. She got to her feet and gathered up her large brown handbag by its useful straps, and the green lined parasol. “Be wary of your friend,” she said to El Gerente, plodding beside him up the hill to the hotel. “The next stage they get to is collecting explosives and dabbling in home-made bombs.” It was one of the curses in this restless age, she added, of the craze for Do it Yourself.

But Tomaso, though even the Gerente did not know it, was far beyond the stage of Do it Yourself. For what was the use of anarchistic friends in Naples, if they couldn’t produce for one a proper, ready-made bomb....?

CHAPTER FOUR

O^N the island of San Juan the word Colombaia does not signify a convent; nor, in fact, does it signify, except symbolically, a dovecote. Innocenta, coming into her inheritance, had been for some time doubtful of finding a use for it; but with the closing of the *convenuto*, many mothers were at a loss what profession to put their girls into, the Orphano no longer had Juanita's press-gang to place its female *innocenti* advantageously in life, as far as their souls at any rate were concerned—recruits therefore were forthcoming and, with the increasing influx of touristi, there was room on the island for expansion of business and for something more refined than the establishment down in the town. At Innocenta's, everything was done discreetly and *comme il faut*: the ankle-length, tight, frilled Spanish skirts that long ago had inspired Mr Cecil's Hipline, were fresh ironed every evening, the bodices were trim and exquisitely clean, it was one girl's stint each afternoon to make up the posies that tucked behind ears or into the smooth coils of hair. Innocenta bustled among them, her high-heeled shoes tip-tapping, intent on her business, only her soul remote. "Lollita, see to your stockings—last night the seams were like adders curving up your legs. Rosa, your shoulder-straps were showing outside the neck of your blouse, it is indecent. Inez, your room is untidy, a disgrace, you should take example by Tartine...." Tartine was from a house in Paris; she had come over to the island for a working holiday and decided to stay—since the Grand Duke had married La Bellissima, all things French were the mode in San Juan, and she had proved very popular—knowing little of the language, she wasted no time in words. "And Loreнна—where is Loreнна?—Loreнна it is the Feast of St Castra the Virgin, we shall be busy."

"But, Senora Innocenta—the little cheesecakes ..."

"Never mind the little cheesecakes, they should be finished already. You will have to be on duty, Loreнна, and that's all there is to it." But her kind heart melted at sight of the reproachful brown eyes. "You shall take any tourists from the hotel, and as long as they are suitable you have my permission to cry."

"Oh, *thank* you Innocenta!"

"Young Americanos and elderly Inghlesi—nobody else, though, and if you have seen them before, you're not even to try; nobody will stand it a second time, unless perhaps it may be an elderly Englishman."

"I promise, Innocenta."

"But mind," said Innocenta, as Tomaso had known that one day she would, "I

can't afford to keep on a girl who does nothing but make cheesecakes and cry."

"If Tomaso would come," said Loreнна, "I would not cry."

"And you would not make cheesecakes either, so there would be no profit to anyone, since Tomaso is *persona grata* here—except to Tomaso. In any event, my child, tonight he will not come. He and El Gerente have their heads together over some conspiracy and once those two start plotting, it goes on till dawn. How Pepita puts up with that Guido Bussaca," said Innocenta impatiently, "no one can imagine. And the same will be said of you, Loreнна, if you marry this good-for-nothing firebrand from the Joyeria. A fine thing!—a well-brought-up Catholic girl, contemplating marriage with such a one. You will break your father's heart."

"My father need not trouble," said Loreнна, sulkily. "Tomaso does not believe in marriage." She recited loyally: "Religion is power in the hands of the few over the credulous majority."

"Well, see that you put your crying act over on the credulous majority this evening," said Innocenta, "or as far as the Colomбаia is concerned, your Tomaso will have you on his hands, marriage or no. Not believe in marriage!" she confided, later, to Lollita and Tartine. "If she is not careful, that child will find herself tied to Tomaso di Goya and Living in Sin." She lowered her voice and her dimpled face blushed rose pink as she spoke the dreadful words. If only, if only, Juanita's canonisation could be got under way, how different all this would be! What profits flowing in!—and from the vulgar soil of hard cash, what exquisite flowers of blessing and benefit, blossoming for them all! A Tomaso growing rapidly rich would have no time to poke his long gipsy nose into the sacred affairs of religion and state; would be happy to settle for a good little, pretty little, pious little wife to manage his family and home. Lollita need work no longer to support her old, crippled grandfather, injured in a smuggling affair forty years ago and embarrassingly determined ever since, not to die; Inez could be released from her articles of apprenticeship and go off down to the Barrequitas colomбаia where—for she was *not* a nice-minded girl—her true métier lay; Tartine could go back to Paris where her naughty heart was; and she, Innocenta—oh! to be free from all this entanglement of cheesecakes and shoulder-ribbons, love and marriage and heartache, scattered face-powder, bright lipstick smeared on paper tissues, the scent of posies, of perfumes, of hair-oil, the stench of hot irons on steaming starched organdie frills.... To walk again behind walls that echoed no longer to day-long chatter, to night-long murmuring, to music and laughter and sentimental song: that folded instead, into their pink-washed arms a flock of young neophytes eager only for contemplation and prayer; each with her generous dot from a family whose business burgeoned and prospered in the general weal. If Juanita had but a halo—how good life would be again!

And here, as though in answer to prayer, was the Senorita Inghlesi, coming through the narrow, wrought-iron gate of the pink-washed wall, her arms full of books.

Mr Cecil, meanwhile, had lost no time in renewing his friendship with the palace. Though he could easily have done so, he gave no notice of his coming: let others crave audiences of the Grand Duke, let others apply months ahead for

rooms at the Bellomare—Mr Cecil on the island of San Juan, came and went as he listed. But he had been careful to array himself in the most conservatively British of his shirts and flannels and self-designed, hand-painted ties: he had long ago found El Exaltida not susceptible to the delicate compliment of San Juan-inspired holiday attire. The Grand Duke himself wore Saville Row suits and was reported by the disaffected to maintain a double in London, for no purpose whatsoever but to stand-in as tailor's dummy; he was known for a fact to ask what people should have their coats brushed for, the implication being that when they got to that state, one surely just threw them away? With the suits, he wore an Old Wykehamist tie and five or six very large rings.

The road to the palace winds steeply, uphill all the way. Two carriage horses, charmingly arrayed in wide straw hats, each, like those of Winsome and Miss Cockrill, adorned with a wreath of flowers, tugged Mr Cecil gaily up—for the Juanese love all dumb creatures and no horse would be asked to undertake a task he would not most willingly perform. Above, as they went, the palatio glittered in fretted white marble against the clear blue sky: a frosted cobweb on the topmost spire of the Cathedral in the Sea. At the arched inner gateway, Mr Cecil alighted and went with his cloaked and sabred guard, up through the terraced gardens to a patio where, by a water-lily pool, El Exaltida sat with La Bellissima, his wife.

It is the tradition of the Hereditary Grand Dukes of San Juan el Pirata, to be enormous. The Grand Duke Juan Lorenzo was no exception to the rule—six foot six, deep-chested, broad-shouldered and magnificently handsome, as also the custom is. Educated in England, he had travelled extensively and had, a year earlier, brought home a French-woman for his wife: to choose from the narrow, already much intermarried aristocracy of the island, would be to court disaster in that matter of obligatory health, strength, size and good looks.

He rose as Mr Cecil entered the patio, a vast, darkly splendid young man, and held out a glittering hand. "Mr Cecil—a pleasure to see you. Ma Belle—je te presente Monsieur Cecil: je t'ai parlé de lui."

Great, luminous blue eyes looked out from a pale, a disenchanting face, crowned with a wealth of smooth, corn-coloured hair. She held out a hand as cool and flawless, and as impersonal, as ivory. "Enchautée, Monsieur." Her figure was narrow, but within its strait confines, softly curved; and Mr Cecil, earnestly practising, even in his thoughts, his latest idiom, found himself reflecting that odds fish, upon his soul and various other exclamations à la Congreve, 'twould be prodigiously entertaining, he warranted himself, to design her clothes for her. An attendant brought glasses and a bottle of pink champagne. With an affectation of almost Eastern modesty, she waited on her guest, handing him the wide glass with a grave inclination of her golden head; and then, bowing slightly also to her husband, was gone—slipping away from them through the dreaming cloisters almost before they knew she had left them. From a neighbouring patio came a sudden chitter-chatter of French, a burst of laughter, a sudden hush, a scutter of scampering high heels. "The Grand Duchess alleviates her exile with a succession of visitors from home," said El Exaltida. "She appears to order them in batches, as she does her French gloves—but with rather less discrimination: she is fond of gloves." Still, they were charming little creatures, he conceded; like a flock of humming-birds, flitting, so pretty and brightly coloured, through the

palace gardens; and only rather tediously gay. "And all so much the same: this time next week, another selection arrives, and I do assure you they will be indistinguishable from these." He sighed. "But you, Mr Cecil—tell me about yourself. How fares the Hipline?"

Not vastly well, acknowledged Mr Cecil. And it was worrying. In fact, that was one of the reasons he was here. "One must get some new ideas. For your sake and mine, I'd like them to be Juanese—something to follow on the Hipline. But *stap* me, if I can think just *what!*" He eyed the Grand Duke hopefully, but 'stap me' appeared to have made no great impression. "And they've got used to San Juan now. We need something new, some sort of a fillip to get them all talking about the island again."

The Grand Duke leaned back indolently on the cool marble seat, his arms outstretched along the back of it, the rings a sparkle of ice and fire on his enormous hands. "What sort of a fillip?"

"Well ... I'd thought of going to El Margherita, she wore a head veil, didn't she? and a sort of loose gown ...? Or yashmaks, even." But he dismissed yashmaks, so messy in restaurants; and anyway, Juanita had not affected the yashmak, though, privately, Mr Cecil thought it might have been an advantage if she had. And that brought him to moustaches. Could one possibly bring the moustache back into fashion? In Victorian days, it had been much admired, a little fine down on the feminine upper lip.... But these things were tricks of the mode, gimmicks for the boutiques and the cosmeticists, what one wanted was something revolutionary, another *line*. Juanita's long, loose dress, for example, caught round the waist by a girdle?—and then, perhaps, by head-dress or hair-do, some suggestion of a halo....? "But, Exaltida, you'd have to get Juanita canonised first."

The indolence was the indolence of the great cats that lie softly relaxed in the green jungle sunshine, every muscle and nerve controlled in readiness to spring. El Exaltida shot forward his great head and looked at Mr Cecil from under suddenly threatening black brows. "Why do you say that?"

Mr Cecil was all of a Restoration twitter. "La, my dear, I protest, how *fierce!*" Scratch the Grand Duke Lorenzo, he thought, and how quick old Juan the Pirate showed through!

"Why should you wish Juanita canonised?"

"I wish?" As if Mr Cecil of Christophe et Cie could care two fitting-room pins about some old frump on a kitchen table! "I couldn't care less, dear, I think she's quite dreadful; really too repellent, I always did." In his agitation, Congreve had deserted him. He said with simple dignity: "I just thought it would pay."

"Everyone in San Juan thinks it would pay," said the Grand Duke. "Some think it would pay spiritually, some—the vast majority—in cash. There are in this island only three people who don't think it would pay at all. One of them is the Grand Duchess: she is unpopular already because she surrounds herself with Frenchwomen, won't bother to learn the language and produces no heir; and she rightly wants no competition from an upstart Beatitude. The second is the mother of the Beatitude concerned: she is ninety, stone deaf and extremely disagreeable and she says and always has said that her daughter was a tiresome, hysterical extrovert and remained one till the end. The third is me. The opposing party is led by a young firebrand in the town—for pelf: and on the spiritual side

by this damned old fool whom you see approaching us now."

And sure enough, the Arcivescovo was coming towards them—toiling in the sunshine up the dazzling white marble steps, his soutane hitched up in one trembling old hand, a black blot against the shimmering white and blue. He was very old and very ugly: and he was dying—slowly and agonisingly dying of a great rodent ulcer that, outwardly healed and leaving only a tapeworm of white scarring on his mottled old forehead, beneath the scarring ate its way into the brain. El Arcivescovo, His Serenity the Archbishop of San Juan, nicknamed El Pato because he resembled that most hideous of all feathered creatures, the Muscovy duck. His left hand grasped the skirt of the black soutane, the right dangled, by habit, unconsciously held out a little so that the faithful might catch at it as he passed by and, with hasty genuflexion, kiss the great, glowing jewel of the episcopal ring....

The Grand Duke and Mr Cecil sketched by a semblance of this ceremony, neither of them caring to risk inhalation of lingering Barrequitas germs; and the old man subsided painfully on to a seat. He looked, as he always looked, as though it were doubtful he would ever rise again. Mr Cecil, not wishing to have his holiday clouded by a death-bed scene, especially one taking place on a garden bench, quickly made his adieux.

The Hierarchy of San Juan el Pirata consists of three; all cadets of the tiny seminary in Barrequitas from which the island priests are drawn. Old Juan, finding his fortress grown to the proportions of a townlet and women and children on his hands, decided that the time had come to turn to God; and, looking round for a likely candidate for episcopal honours, lit upon an old pirate chum, ripe for retirement from the sea, spruced him up, stuck a looted mitre on his head, and instructed him to found a church; having, with memories of Lisbon and Venice where most of his business was conducted, created him Patriarch. The Patriarch, his duties growing arduous, created an Archbishop to assist him, who in turn created a Bishop: all three gentlemen, however, jumping to it with alacrity when their patron snapped finger and thumb. This position continues relatively unchanged up to the present day. Cut off from the mainland by language difficulties—and its confusion of Spanish and Italian makes Juanese especially difficult to anyone speaking either—San Juan is forced by necessity as well as by strong inclination, to be self-supporting; and in the matter of the Church, especially so. Its leaders are selected arbitrarily by the Grand Duke and since their election is for life, the only way to get rid of them is to end that condition. More than one Grand Duke has availed himself of this privilege and in not very ancient times. High positions are coveted in San Juan by none but the most ambitious; and kept only by the extraordinarily discreet.

The Arcivescovo, with nothing very much to lose but his life and that uncomfortable and anyway already forfeit, was growing in his old age, alarmingly indiscreet. He was a good, holy old man: it had stood between him and the Patriarchy, his former Obispo having been promoted over his head. Now he had two remaining wishes only: to see before he died—and he knew that death was very near—El Margherita canonised; and to see the Grand Duke Lorenzo with a son and heir. It was to discuss these two matters that he had craved audience today.

El Exaltida sat impatiently through the slow unfolding of the rose of the old

man's mind. "As to a child, Arcivescovo, what would you have me do? Do you wish to come with me and supervise the affairs of my marriage bed?"

"I should like to be assured, Exaltida, that it is to your marriage bed that you go."

The Grand Duke raised his right hand with a swift movement as though he would strike out at the thin, old, ravaged face. But he controlled himself and lowered it again. "I go to my wife's bed, Arcivescovo, and to nobody else's—at present." Anger smouldered in him, flamed up suddenly, died down again. He knew of a punishment far more telling than a physical blow. "If there is a fault it lies with the Grand Duchess. Perhaps you would suggest—divorce?"

"A divorce? Per Dios, Exaltida ...!"

"La Bellissima is not Catholic—or only by adoption since she came to this country; it means very little to her. She is young and she is beautiful: for fear of her beauty, she takes secret means so that she shall have no child. Her mother is a clever woman; it is she, I suppose, who instructs her in this matter. I have protested but I am met with bland protestations. I can do nothing more about it. So what do you propose?"

"But divorce!" The old man choked and stammered, a purple flush mounted upwards across the gnarled old face, leaving the grooved scar livid and hideous against the receded hairline. "Exaltida, this is not for a moment to be thought of. The Church does not permit divorce. Think of the scandal to your people, Exaltida; think of the effect on the life of this island, think of your own immortal soul." And he drew himself up in quavering dignity and repeated, heartsick and afraid: "It is unthinkable. I speak to you with the voice of our Holy Mother Church: it is impossible that you should resort to divorce."

"That is what the Grand Duchess is relying on," said El Exaltida; and his hands relaxed like the paws of a cat releasing a claw-marked mouse and letting it go. "Very well, Archbishop. A child will come when God—and La Bellissima's mama—see fit. So that is the end of that. What else was there?"

What else but the matter of El Margherita? "The question of applying to the Pope is in the hands of the Patriarch."

"When I speak to El Patriarca, he says it is for you, Exaltida, to decide."

"Very well, then, you may safely leave it between the two of us."

"But you do nothing. Sometimes I almost think," said the old man, fretfully, "that I should write to Rome myself."

"You would be exceedingly ill-advised to do so," said the Grand Duke; and his voice was warm black treacle with vitriol in it.

The Arcivescovo shrugged his gaunt shoulders under the black soutane. "He who has nothing left, need not fear to lose it. If I thought I could do good, I would try. But I know nothing of these things, not even whom to address. You and El Beatitud hug it all to yourselves...."

"It is the province of the Patriarchs of San Juan to conduct our affairs with Rome. Attend to your own business, which is the care of the Cathedral and the cure of souls: and leave the rest alone—or you will find yourself not here to do either."

"As to that, Exaltida, threats cannot frighten me." He touched the terrible scar with fingers thin and noded as bamboo sticks. "I am soon to die."

"And no doubt would rather do so in your bed than on the floor of a dungeon

in the bowels of the prison. You would not be the first, my Lord—and no questions asked. I will not have interference in these matters. Do not speak of them again.” He snapped his fingers with a sound like a pistol shot and a guard sprang forward from an inner archway and stood at attention. “Very well, Arcivescovo: the audience is ended.”

But long, long after the tragic figure had groped its slow way down the marble steps, he sat on, silently, gazing with unseeing eyes at the stretched blue satin of the water-lilly pool. Beside him in its shallow glass, the hissing sparkle of the pink champagne died to an almost imperceptible seething: and, before the Grand Duke stirred again, was still.

CHAPTER FIVE

A^{NEW} crowd of people had arrived at the hotel that evening a ‘grouppa’

under the aegis of Odyssey Tours; a little late in the season, but specially arranged to include the Domenica di Boia and the Fiesta di San Juan. These are high days and holidays on the island and their customs, of great age and enormous interest to students, especially those of barbarity and pornography, naturally attract a large number of tourists. Miss Cockrill watched their arrival from her balcony. Tight-packed into carriages, they were drawn up from Barrequitas by horses not quite so enthusiastic as Mr Cecil’s had been earlier that afternoon and, now that the sun had gone down, no longer wearing hats, and descended with cries of rapture if only at the easing of their discomforts: amazed and enchanted, or condescendingly at home, according to whether or not they had ever before made so much as a day trip to the island. Winsome Foley came out of her room and joined Cousin Hat at the balcony rail.

Winsome had had a Simply Wonderful day. She had been up to the Colombaia and had a long talk with Innocenta; and Innocenta was *delighted* with the work she had done on the translations. Innocenta herself had contributed several exercise books filled with her sharp, slanting script in purple ink and, said Winsome, too deliciously Quaint. She would have proceeded to quotation of some of the quaintnesses, but Cousin Hat said for goodness sake no, my dear, whimsey made her feel sick. So she turned away her head and counted up to ten and in a voice of gentle patience began again on a new tack. The house was enchanting inside (she had never before penetrated so far, having met Innocenta for the first time on almost the last day of her previous visit), and that too was deliciously Quaint. “You go in through a patio all covered with vines: and actually grapes, Cousin Hat, hanging down from the vines, so that you can just put up your hand and pick them. Isn’t that amazing?”

“It might be if they were anything but vines,” said Cousin Hat.

And then on into a great cool room, went on Winsome doggedly, having counted another ten; all whitewashed and with frescoes on the walls.... (The frescoes had been rather curious, they would certainly have to be painted over if ever the place became a convento again. One of the daughters, she supposed, a talent that way; and one knew that to the artistic eye the Female Form Divine meant nothing at all, just nothing at all....) “And there they all were, such charming creatures, though none of them takes after Innocenta one bit!—running in and out as she and I sat talking, begging—so prettily!—for a length of

coloured thread, the loan of a needle, help with ironing a difficult frill.... Preparing for a party, I imagine, they all seemed to be freshening up their best dresses and there was a delicious smell from the kitchen; cheesecakes, Innocenta told me, 'specialité de la maison' at the moment, it appears! I didn't enquire too closely in case they should think I was hinting for an invitation. But it was a charming scene!"

"It sounds delightful," said Cousin Hat, bored to tears with it.

"So I tactfully stole away when I thought they would be wanting to get the room ready for the dancing; and went up to the Duomo and put up my little candle in Juanita's chapel; and said my little prayer...."

"How is Juanita looking? Has she got any blacker?"

"The continental habit of embalming the bodies of their saints—" began Winsome, having counted yet another ten.

"—and dressing them up in mauve satin, is quite revolting. And what *I* want to know is—how do they know which ones to set about embalming? Or do they just do everyone on spec., in the hopes that some will strike lucky and go on and get canonised? They take long enough about it in all conscience. Look at Juanita: twenty years!"

"It is their lives that are saintly, Cousin Hat. You don't," said Winsome, really quite tartly for her, "just collect up the dead and say eeny, meeny, miney, mo. Of course you know if a person's a saint, when he dies."

"Everyone is a saint when he dies," said Cousin Hat; adding with a sniff, "for a very short time."

Winsome said, tolerantly laughing that now, now, Cousin Hat mustn't be cynical! Besides, there was the matter of miracles. As far as she understood it, it was required by Rome that there should be—as well as evidence of exemplary conduct and an influence for good in the lifetime—proof of four miracles, two during life and two after death. So far—and it might well be this was holding up matters with El Exaltida and the Patriarch—Juanita could really be credited with not more than three. Her own mother had been brought to her (furiously struggling, but Winsome was not to know that), with ears so distended and painful as to make it seem almost certain that she must die. And Juanita had just laid her hand on her mother's head and her mother had given one convulsive shudder—Innocenta had seen it, she had been there!—and the distension had suddenly disappeared, just like that, and all the pain with it; and the mother was still living, at a very great age....

"And stone deaf," said Cousin Hat.

And there had been some business of a false accusation of robbery with violence, as to whose details Winsome was admittedly not very clear. But certainly the true villain had been miraculously brought by Juanita to confess his crime. They had given him, on his death-bed, some garment of hers....

"Like a bloodhound, you mean?"

... and the man, a hardened criminal, had burst into tears and suddenly Told All. The miracle, had Winsome known it, lay not so much in anyone in San Juan confessing to anything, though that was rare enough, as in anyone having taken the slightest notice of a robbery, with violence or without. Still, the felon—at point of death and no longer within reach of Juanese law—had indubitably confessed; and it was not Juanita's fault if, through his delay in applying for her

remote-control ministrations, he had allowed the falsely accused to moulder long since 'into merciful death.' And finally there was the Arcivescovo who, patient and trustful, had from the first onset of the lupus, now many years ago, prostrated himself daily before the glass coffin; and to this attributed his present (not exactly enviable) condition—but who, at least, was alive: if he was alive. Variouslly interpreted, these demonstrations constituted Juanita's claim to thauma-turgical powers: and it seemed to Miss Cockrill that only the eye of faith could review it as anything but a slender stock-in-trade. Her observations to this effect, however, were not well received. Winsome counted ten, counted twenty, opened her mouth to speak, ran up another ten: and suddenly found it a teeny bit chilly and thought she would go back to her room. Miss Cockrill continued to stand complacently at the balcony rail.

It was not chilly at all: a lovely evening, balmy and clear and with, even at this hour, a little warm, scented breeze blowing in across the pines. Below her, the hotel guests strolled up and down the terrace awaiting the dinner hour, which in San Juan el Pirata as in Spain, is not earlier than nine. Snatches of their conversation drifted up to her. Someone had bought something 'terribly cheap—smuggled my dear, of course,' someone was rhapsodising over the olla del hongí, a stew of Juanese toadstools much delighted in by tourists though formerly, and rightly, considered only fit for feeding pigs; a gentleman had had an experience some evenings before which he was confiding to a fellow guest—the words, 'charming creature,' 'nothing but cry,' 'cruel stepfather,' 'promised not to tell the Patranne' floated up to Miss Cockrill in a pot pourri of, to her, meaningless sound. The drivers of the long line of carriages were paid off, the horses clip-clopped merrily away, a figure detached itself from the shadows where the paying and tipping had gone on and walked with short, purposeful strides to the big front door. She was about to turn and go into her room when something about that stubby figure in its stout grey flannels and dark-blue, brass-buttoned blazer, caught her attention. She turned back to the rail; and she must have exclaimed for a red face and large white moustache were suddenly raised and a voice said, "God bless my soul! It's Hat!"

In unalloyed pleasure? Or had there been an almost imperceptible note of despondency and alarm?

It was twenty-five years since first Major Bull—he was Captain Bull then—had met Miss Cockrill and, puffing and blowing a little for he was even then of a full habit, had offered her his heart. Why she had refused him, she would probably, for she was not given to self-examination, never know. The plain woman's defence, perhaps, against the jealous mockery of her narrow little world: 'Good heavens—Harriet Cockrill got off, and at her age! Then there's hope for us all....' And the corollary, 'But she's got a bit of money, of *course*.' Dick Bull had had no money, only his army pay; and he had taken that and offered it to the first pretty woman he met on leaving Hat; as the next best, he had later assured her, to going off and shooting big game. It had come to rather the same thing in the end, as matters turned out for, out with the guns in Bangalore one day, the Major's lady, as she had then become, had been shot by her husband in mistake for a bird—and not a bad shot either, in any respect. Stricken with remorse—for he was too honest to pretend a grief he could not possibly feel and which,

moreover, must be shared with his Colonel, two subalterns and several woman-starved members of the I.C.S., the widower had come home to England and, eventually, to Hat. Miss Cockrill, in uneasy double harness with her ward, Winsome Foley, had received with gratitude and regrets a subdued renewal of his suit: once more the defence mechanism went into action and—she could not leave poor Winsome, she had promised her dead sister, she did not feel it right to saddle him with two women, etcetera, etcetera. The gallant major withdrew to the heights a little above Heronsford, in Kent, where his lady resided, and from thence, his face growing larger and redder, his moustache larger and whiter as the years went by, made dabbling little sorties as occasion offered or thwarted devotion ordained. And Miss Cockrill henceforward met the scorn which, nowadays at any rate, existed only in her own mind, by hugging to herself the secret knowledge that an she would she could; and allowed herself more and more to resent poor Winsome for ‘standing in her way.’

She went in through her room and down the wide central staircase to the hall. “My dear Dick—what on earth are you doing here?”

The Major puffed and blew. “My dear Hat—I might ask you the same thing!” But his face was wreathed in smiles, the moment of doubt—if moment there had been—was past. “Came out with a ‘party.’ Funniest joke in the world. Courier. Me!”

“A courier?”

“Hush, not so loud, old girl, all these people respect me, think I’m the cat’s whiskers. Conducted tour, you know, conducted ’em all the way from England—France, Italy, bit of Switzerland, no it was Austria, somewhere like that, all mountains anyway—and here we are! Can’t speak a word of the lingo but I couldn’t in France and Italy either and we did all right there. Old campaigner, you know: just raise your voice a bit and wave your arms and if you happen to have a dirty dollar bill between your fingers, it works every time. Keep a dollar bill for nothing else but waving: pay out, of course, as per promise, but not with my dollar.” He fished it out of his pocket and showed it to her. In point of dirtiness at least, it was unexceptionable.

“But my dear Dick, I don’t know what on earth you’re talking about. I haven’t seen you....”

“Not for ages, old girl. Just the point. You gadding round up in Town on these blessed translations, dashing in and out of the liberties with Winnie; me stuck down there in Heronsford and beginning to feel off me oats. A change, old boy, I said to myself, that’s what you want, a change. Drifted into this agency and bless me soul, if I didn’t come out with a job! Always on the look-out for couriers, you know, reliable chaps who can keep their heads and speak a bit of the lingo....”

“But you can’t speak a word of any ‘lingo’; except Hindustani, and that’s no use to you here. You’ve just said so, this minute.”

“But only to you, Hat,” said the Major, nervously. He looked round at his flock. “They none of them know; and neither do the fellers up at that head office of theirs.” The Major, it seemed, was an Old Campaigner in more ways than one.

Winsome came down to dinner a little pink round the eyelids and inordinately pleased to see Major Bull, who dined at their table. She had had a little weep in the privacy of her room and had been unwilling to meet the bright eyes of

Cousin Hat—which now, by God’s grace would be directed to the Major’s, which were prominent and blue. It had been, for all her brave description, a disappointing day. That Innocenta, her friend and colleague, should have been so ready to let her go off alone from the Colombaia that evening, when a party was planned, had seemed—well, not very kind. Young people were expected, no doubt; the girls would have jolly young friends, there would be noisy laughter and foolish fun, a little silly horseplay, perhaps—but one was Broadminded, Innocenta should surely have known that one would be happy to sit by with the mothers and the aunts and watch the young folk enjoy themselves: gliding round just once or twice, perhaps, with one of the gay gallants, for she had been an excellent waltzer in her girlhood days and could soon have mastered the simple Juanese steps.... But no. She had been allowed to drift away with only a couple of cheesecakes by way of consolation; had felt that behind her departing back, Innocenta and her daughters had exchanged glances of something like relief; had been even rather surprised at her staying so long. And up at the Duomo, the mood of disillusion had persisted. Juanita had looked, as Cousin Hat in her crude way had suggested, disagreeably black; with her garish mauve gown and her tawdry gold lace and the terrible pink and white mask that she wore over her doubtless far more terrible face. All delightfully quaint, of course: all wonderfully right for these simple hearts, for these happy children with their unschooled æsthetic tastes; but—not worthy of those wonderful words that, over the long, happy days of her work on the translations, had burned their pious messages into her soul. And then ...

And then there had been the meeting with the young man from the Joyeria....

Tomaso di Goya had gone up to the cathedral to study the relic situation, in Juanita’s chapel. Despite Miss Cockrill’s dash of cold water, he could not help believing that somewhere there, must lie the solution to the catastrophe of the little boxes. A woman had been there, standing silently before the glass coffin beneath the hanging table; but she had been some gaunt tourist, not a patch of firm, rounded flesh on her such as Tomaso delighted in, and he had given her not another glance. But then she had stretched out her hand to a candle and he had seen again the opal ring.

Child of a long line of goldsmiths and jewellers, direct descendant of a painter of genius, Tomaso di Goya loved all lovely things; son of a strolling gipsy mother, he must for ever act a part. He affected no glimmer of recognition but, softly moving, stepped forward and lighted a candle, slipped money into the box, stood back, and, eyes closed, murmured a prayer. Only when he lifted his head again to look reverently up at the crumb-scattered table, did he give a great start, an exclamation of happy astonishment. Ecco! La Seniorita! La Seniorita del Opale! Bowing and flourishing and clicking his heels, he kissed the chill knuckle above the opal ring. A thing of beauty! Miracoloso! He had recognised it—she recollected his remarking upon it yesterday, aboard the vaporetto?—and he had recognised it again as she moved her hand in the candlelight....

Just offering up ones own little personal glow-worm of prayer to their dear Santa Juanita.

Ah, but *not* ‘Santa’ Juanita, said Tomaso, mounting immediately upon the hobby-horse of his present discontent. Not even ‘Beata’ Juanita. His High and Mightiness the Grand Duke decreed otherwise; and so she, the poor one, the

blesséd one, their island angel, must lie here patiently (a thing she would most assuredly never have done in her lifetime) and see herself passed over while the infinitely lesser fry of other lands jockeyed successfully for position in the heavenly hierarchy.... He broke off, however, he begged her pardon; the *Senorita* could not be interested in what after all was purely a matter of Juanese politics.

"Hardly politics, *Senor di Goya*? This is surely a question for the Church alone?"

That was all the *Senorita* knew about it, said *Tomaso* bitterly. If it were left to the Church, *Juanita* would have had her rights long ago. It was well known that the *Arcivescovo* prayed day and night for nothing else; the Patriarch it was true was in the Grand Duke's hands, and alas! the *Obispo* also, who would replace the poor old Archbishop when he died—but, left to themselves, they would have been as enthusiastic as any in San Juan. Only the Grand Duke, for dark and desperate purposes of his own.... Off galloped *Tomaso* on the hobby-horse, hell-for-leather, once again: the profit to San Juan, the rights of the people, the yoke of the tyrant, the deserts of *Juanita*, the impossibility of resistance in Rome once the truth became known there, the table, the miracles....

Try as she would, *Winsome* could sort out from the long list of miracles, not more than three that could really stand up to the name.

Tomaso shrugged immensely. With goodwill on all sides, these matters arranged themselves. A little exaggeration here, a little discretion there....

"You mean make up a miracle?"

He threw wide his expressive brown hands, his shoulders up to his ears. No need to do that. Simply take some old episode, burnish it up a little—what did facts matter? they all knew well enough that *Juanita* had been a saint. "It is not of importance, *Senorita*, by what means Rome comes to the same conclusion."

"I was only thinking," said *Winsome*, "that if you were going to do that, it would be better to have a new miracle altogether: now."

His hands dropped, his shoulders dropped—his jaw dropped. He stood staring at her, a very caricature of stunned amazement. "A new miracle—now?"

"That would drive your *Exaltida* into doing something, wouldn't it?" said *Winsome*, briskly.

For *Winsome*, also, thought it mattered very little by what means the Church of Rome was brought to recognise what, to so fervent a student of the *Diaries* as herself, was but self-evident truth. *Juanita* had been a saint, had poured forth the exquisite aspirations of her sanctity in words which she, *Winsome*, alone was to translate to the English-speaking peoples and these words, these writings, these torrents of purple ink would remain unknown, an irreparable loss to a world never more sadly in need of such exhortation, until the College of Cardinals pronounced the verdict which would launch them on a flood of religious fame. "It would have to be something very simple, of course," said *Winsome*, coolly, "and nobody must know."

"No one might know, *Senorita*, but every one in San Juan would suspect."

"As long as nobody in Rome suspected," said *Winsome*, "that needn't matter either." And after all who, she said, could Rome suspect?

"Everyone in San Juan," said *Tomaso*, with simplicity.

That *Winsome Foley* at this stage contemplated for one moment actually taking part in any fraudulence on *Juanita's* behalf, or for that matter really

believed that a fraud would be perpetrated, was of course by no means the case. But—there was a foolish excitement in pretending that it might, it was flattering after the rebuff of the earlier evening to be receiving the wide-eyed homage of this clever young man, in being the leading spirit in a pious conspiracy, half-laughing, half-eagerly earnest; in sitting with him like two conspiratorial children, upon the steps before Juanita's glass coffin, in the flickering light and shade of her votive candles, and playing with ideas and plots. They strolled together, animatedly chatting, through the narrow streets leading back to the hotel. They passed his shop and he urged her to come in. "No, no indeed, I must get back to the evening collatione."

"The collatione at the Bellomare, *Senorita*, is not until nine o'clock."

"Well, but it's eight o'clock now; I really must go."

"Come then after dinner, *Senorita*: we will drink a *Juanello* together in my *Joyeria*, I will show you my treasures, we will enter into our conspiracy. It is naughty, but it is harmless, and it is fun...."

He was waiting for her, lurking in the shadows by the hotel gate; with Tomaso it was impossible simply to stand and wait, without creating an impression of being in hiding. But he stepped forward boldly and imprinted one of his chaste but florid kisses on her knuckly hand; and it was fun, it was flattering, it was above all a triumph over Cousin Hat with her bruising irritabilities. He had laid out a little treat for her in the *Joyeria*, tiny glasses, gold rimmed, for the *Juanello*, some of Lorennia's little cheesecakes in a silver box: he had popped up to the Colombaia in the meantime to snatch a kiss from Lorennia and scrounge a few. She sat among the jewels and the trinkets in the shifting shadows of the single, swinging lantern, beneath the hanging bird-cages, gold and silver-gilt, each with its jewelled and enamelled singing-bird, feeling the soft, cool slither of pearls between her fingers, sipping her *Juanello*, closing herself in again with unreality. She had at his earlier invitation brought Juanita's diary with her (Volume I), and they became almost hysterical with muffled laughter, hunting through it for some 'reference' to a miracle to be performed twenty years after the writer's death. All the best saints gave notice of posthumous 'signs.' "Sœur Thérèse of Lisieux, for example, promised showers of roses."

"The rose is the national flower of San Juan," said Tomaso, thoughtfully.

"Still, we'd better have something original. You wouldn't like to go to the trouble of organising roses, and then find Sœur Thérèse of Lisieux getting all the credit." She went off into gales of laughter at her own wit and held out her tiny glass for more *Juanello*.

Tomaso di Goya, pouring the *Juanello*, judged that his moment had come. Tomaso had worked very hard on the problem since the hour of their parting for the collatione; and in no spirit of conspiratorial fun. He said now with a tremendous effect of dawning inspiration, that the business of roses was altogether too 'natural' for them, that the answer lay far more probably in his own skill and artifice. "If, for example ... There is the *thurible*, the Cellini *thurible*, which only the Grand Duke uses, offering up incense before the Gospel is read, on fiesta days.... If, let us say, when he used the censer on some given day, not white clouds of incense arose but coloured clouds—pink clouds, rose-coloured clouds, the rose is the national flower of San Juan, you know—and the scent of roses ..." He broke off. He asked, all casual, the question that he had

brought her here to ask: the question which she alone (with the possible exception of Innocenta who also was familiar with Juanita's writings) might be able to answer. "Is there any reference in the Diaries, Senorita, which might be taken—or twisted!—to suggest that Juanita would one day send some such sign?"

Whether or not it had existed before, by the time Winsome Foley made her gay and tipsy way home that night, such a reference did indubitably appear in the Diary (Volume I). Tomaso was a dab hand at forging 'facsimile' handwriting on surfaces of silver and gold: so why not on a page of purple-lined paper as well?

CHAPTER SIX

M_R Cecil and Major Bull, introduced by Miss Cockrill, were delighted with

one another. Mr Cecil had himself first come to San Juan 'conducted' by Odyssey Tours, and professed himself prodigiously entertained by the Major's witty descriptions of his adventures with il grouppa ('Oddity Tours, *I* call 'em, my dear feller ...!') Major Bull, on the other hand, listened enraptured to gossip from the world of haute couture, all in garbled Restorationese. Both parties, in fact, prided themselves on collecting 'freaks' and had collected one another at sight.

The Sunday before the Fiesta di San Juan is a gala in itself, being known as Domenica di Boia or Hangman's Sabbath. In early days, it was thought a proper attention to the bloodstained memory of the Founder, to abstain from all public executions during the week of celebrations that commemorate his translation into heaven. From this arose a custom of saving up prisoners during the months of August and September so that such as survived the intervening weeks in gaol might be transported—amid much rejoicing, for a nice hanging is irresistibly delightful to the Juanese—to a neighbouring island and there done to death en masse on a specially constructed gallow, ('or eight-nooser,' suggested Mr Cecil, informed of these origins). The custom has in these degenerate days lapsed for want of material; but the special Mass survives and the Sermone de Defunto, and the Juanese flock over to the island with their wives and families—it is very much Children's Day—and carrying enormous picnic baskets; effigies are hanged with much ceremony and laughter and in the swinging shadows there is music and dancing as in days of yore. To this jamboree the Major must, of course, conduct his party; and Miss Cockrill and her niece and Mr Cecil declared their intention of going with them.

Cousin Hat had agreed, with the rest of the party, to go to the Mass in the cathedral and from thence down to the quay to embark for the excursion; and, standing in her trampled straw hat and unlovely linen dress, a green-lined parasol of outmoded design stuck under her arm to the great inconvenience of her close-packed neighbours, she watched with the bland impertinence of the English churchgoer, the extraordinary carryings-on of those whose religious observances differed from her own. What she would have felt had a group of foreigners (with mackintoshes and umbrellas) in a similar spirit of contempt invaded St Asaph's, Heronsford Green, she did not pause to think. Not that the Juanese would have cared a fig for her reflections. Gay as children on this fine fiesta day, they hailed one another across the great, dim, old church, met by

appointment at this side-chapel, that group of confessional boxes, dragged rush-bottomed prie-Dieu into friendly circles and sat animatedly chatting, their picnic baskets banked high about them, the children chasing one another merrily among the legs of the vast, standing congregation. Among them, disregarded and undisturbed, knelt quiet figures, heads bent, hands tightly clasped, praying away happily all alone with God; and before the great crucifix crouched a woman, tears streaming down her face, her forehead pressed against the nailed bronze feet that the brows of countless supplicants had burnished to gold. (Pure exhibitionism, said Miss Cockrill, quite out loud; but the woman prayed on, a million miles away in some Gethsemane of her own; and cared not at all for Cousin Hat.)

Innocenta arrived, a plump mother duck, bustling to a place of advantage, shoo-ing before her her exquisite little brood. The regulation black lace shawls of Juanese church-going were pulled decorously half across their faces, only their lovely eyes looked out, dark and enormous, cast modestly down to the ground. Except for Inez. Inez looked about her boldly and fluttered an eyelash at a couple of crew-cut touristi.... "That will do, Irreverence," said Innocenta, kicking her smartly behind the knees with the edge of a well-filled hamper; and really, she confided to Tartine, that girl would have to go. "Not the morals of a *cat*!" In San Juan, the cats are lint white with pale blue eyes; they wear blue ribbons round their necks and are much loved and charmingly well-behaved: but not with other cats.

A bell rang. There was a sudden hush, a scraping of chairs on the stone floor, everyone stood on tiptoe. But it was not the Mass beginning, it was the Grand Duke arriving with La Bellissima the Grand Duchess, and their train; the train including a flutter of the little French friends, sniggling behind their demure Juanese black lace veils. They giggled their way up into the gallery overlooking the altar, reserved for the ladies of the palace, in the wake of an ancient crone, carried in a sort of palanquin—La Madre, mother of El Margherita herself. The Grand Duke and Duchess went forward quietly and took their places at two great, carved and gilded wooden prie-Dieu, set apart, close up to the altar rails. They wore, as custom ordained, black velvet cloaks, his caught up by the right corner and thrown across his breast and over the opposite shoulder almost burying his mouth and chin, hers flowing out and down to her heels; with collars of wrought gold set with precious stones. La Bellissima, like every other well-conducted woman in the church, wore a heavy black veil pulled half across her face—it was widely believed that in this disguise she frequently sent a deputy to the Mass; but no other head, in that island of dark brunettes, could have shone beneath the lace with such a gleam of gold. Before the prie-Dieu, lazily glowing, the golden thurible* hung on its golden stand.

The Mass began.

El Patriarca sang the Mass. Robed in black, before an altar hung with black, he moved, a grey man with a clever, worldly face, pacing slowly through the age-old ritual, lingering over words unchanged through centuries, in a language dead to change. There was a rustle of pages as the congregation sought through their Missals for the Epistle for the Day, following the Latin in the Juanese translations alongside. He passed, bowing, across the altar front, to the Gospel side. An assistant lifted the great book from the Epistle corner and carried it, supporting

its weight against his own forehead, down into the sanctuary; and paused before the Grand Duke.

The Cellini thurible hung with its handful of glowing coals before the two prie-Dieu. The Grand Duke rose, took incense in a golden spoon and sprinkled a little on the coals; and when the sweet-scented smoke began to rise in its thin, grey thread, went forward and, kneeling before the Book, lifted the thurible on its sliding chains, tossed it a little forward, twice, and then up high, so that the smoke billowed out and all about the Book; and, repeating the movement three times, rose, bowed, and retired, moving slowly backwards to his prie-Dieu. The Gospel was read, the celebrant and assisting priests sat down in their places all about the altar, with folded hands. The thurible hung dormant again, on its stand. The Arcivescovo stumbled up the pulpit steps.

The Sermone de Defunto as preached upon this fiesta, is also traditional, and to the Juanese almost the best part of the day—a thundering denunciation of their lustful lives and deliciously terrifying threats of hell-fire awaiting them all too soon. Not that they believe a word of it; the good God who made His sons vigorous and His daughters beautiful, is kind and loving and will forgive; but old childhood fears prevail and though the Archbishop's voice had of recent years lost much of its ranting power, still the familiar words could send a shiver through the soul and many a firm purpose of amendment had been known to last right through the day of merry-making that followed, till the kindly moonlight came.... It was a considerable disappointment, therefore, to find El Anitra not giving them the Sermone de Defunto at all.

For the Archbishop was speaking not of the dead but of the living; not of the end but of the beginning; not of death but of birth. How great was the sin, cried the Archbishop raising a shaking emaciated hand, naming no names, of a woman who out of vanity and selfishness denied life to her children ...! How great the abomination of passions gratified for no sake but their own! A man and a woman, a husband and wife, be they great or humble, rich or poor, came together for the procreation of their children; and to deny them being was lust and shame and a sin before the Lord.... The Juanese with their happy, teeming families and well-stocked Orfano del Innocenti, listened in astonishment. But soon a word was spoken in the body of the church, a name was named in a whisper that licked round the congregation like a flame. La Bellissima heard the low hiss of the sibilants and lifted her lovely head for a moment but gave no other sign. The Grand Duke sat rigid and silent in his chair. The Archbishop moved on to his second hobby-horse. It was the deep wish of the people of San Juan, that the name of their island saint be forwarded *without further delay* to Rome.... No one—no one, insisted the old man, forcing up his quavering old voice to a sort of shriek, had the right to deny so pious and proper a wish....

The Grand Duke waited until the Mass was technically over; and then, not waiting for the Dismissal, rose to his splendid height, put out his hand to the Grand Duchess and led her slowly out—slowly, magnificently, deliberately pacing, not across the altar front and to the side door as is the Grand Ducal custom, but straight down through the body of the church, the people falling back, awed and amazed, to let them pass: down the long nave, out through the great West door and on to the cathedral steps. His carriage, elaborately carved and gilded, had been hastily brought round and he handed La Bellissima in. El

Gerente de Politio shouted an order, his men stamped and shuffled their dirty white gym-shoes, slapped silver-chased blunderbusses with filthy brown hands. The carriage drove off. Up at the High Altar, the Mass went quietly on to its conclusion. Alone before Juanita's glass coffin, the Arcivescovo knelt with outstretched arm, and prepared for the terror to come.

* In the old days of humility before God, it had been the tradition for the Juanese Grand Dukes to serve as altar boys at Mass. With the steady maintainence of their hereditary immensity, however, and the consequent inconvenience of having them lumbering about, ill-disciplined, in the circumscribed space of the sanctuary before the altar, the duties whittled down to a single offering of incense immediately prior to the reading of the Gospel, before the Canon of the Mass. The thurible, a treasure preserved for this purpose alone, is a thing of remarkable beauty attributed to Cellini and the pious loot of El Pirata himself; handed down from generation to generation and exclusively in the charge of the current Arcivescovo, whose care the cathedral is.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE vagaries of the British on (conducted) tour have been described elsewhere. 'Gay ones, jolly ones, vulgar ones; refined ones looking down upon the jolly ones and hoping they wouldn't shame them by whipping out funny hats. ... Easy-going ones. Complaining ones. Experienced ones. Robust ones who drank Water out of taps and confounded the experienced ones by not going down with bouts of dysentery, anxious ones who refused all shell-fish, raw fruit and unbottled beverages and went down with dysentery before they had even started; neurotic ones, turning pale together at the sight of heaped dishes of death-dealing green figs and peaches, hearty ones calling loudly for *lo nachurelle* and assuring one another that a smattering of French would take one all over the world.... Pretty ones, plain ones, downright repellent ones....'

The Major's group, aboard the *Bellomare's* privately hired vaporetto, formed a fairly representative collection. They stood about in chatty little groups, for all the world, cried Mr Cecil, like the *Noyades*, bound together in bundles and spinning down the Loire to Nantes: only they were chugging, with much steaming and hooting, across the five-mile wide stretch from San Juan to the satellite island of Tenebros. There was a ponderous lady novelist in search of a setting for yet another volume of childhood dark doings and subsequent in-growing remorse: all written in language so obscure as to force even the most literate to read only between the lines. There were the inevitable half dozen widows whose husbands had overworked themselves to a premature death, apparently for no reason than to enable their relicts to console their loss with expensive trips abroad. There was the gentleman who, having cheerfully invested two hundred pounds in this outing of pleasure, now made himself miserable night and day, lest he be cheated out of a penny's worth (he had a curious walk, the feet straddled widely apart and was known to the group as *Fuddyduddy*); and there were two ladies suffering from stomach trouble who always did suffer from stomach trouble when they went abroad but who went abroad religiously, year after year, and proudly boasted the capitals they had been sick in; and a spinster aunt with her handsome niece whose chances of marriage she was, from some obscure reasons of jealousy, though devoted to the niece, resolutely destroying: Grim and Gruff they were named—Mr Cecil had met them on a previous *Odyssey Tour*. And there were the *Bilsons*.

Mr and Mrs *Bilson* were known as the *Back-Homes*. He was a builder, back home in California, and they were on their first trip to the beautiful continent of

Europe; but displeased to find so little poverty there, for it was well known that Europe was supported entirely by U.S. dollars and they could not approve the general air of well-being and bonhomie. The Major, ever anxious to oblige, was always on the lookout for a barefoot child for them but those they saw looked depressingly as if they went without shoes because they didn't like shoes. Mrs Bilson was pledged to give a lecture to her Women's Club back home and exercised exclusively with the collection of data for this assignment; Mr Bilson had not yet recovered from the lack of initiative shown by the Italians in the matter of the leaning tower of Pisa. They were happy, however, in the knowledge that everything they saw in the way of Art was either faked or frankly a copy, the real stuff being all back home in the U.S., centred largely upon the Forest Lawns Cemetery, California. They were tactful and courteous about it; but absolutely firm.

The hotel had put up a picnic lunch for its party and all was madly gay. Mr. Cecil, dressed to the nines in Juanese costume (modified to suit in the workrooms of Christophe et Cie.) was the very spirit of fiesta, darting from one group to another, retailing his joke about the eight-nooser, trying out his Restorationese before its London debut. The Major also was in splendid form, surrounded by his group, the admiration of the six widows in his brass-buttoned blazer and a curious little round hat made of stitched white linen. He had intended locking himself into the ship's excusado and hurriedly mugging up bits about Tenebrossa; but this proving impracticable, for the single apartment was available to ladies and gentlemen alike and not very agreeable to either, had contented himself with a couple of stiff Juanellos and a Quiet Talk with Hat who was apt to interrupt without ceremony. Thus fortified, he gathered his party about him—others might listen-in if they wished to, the Major was entirely complacent—and, balancing himself on a bollard above the heads of the crowd, began a little speech. "H'rm, h'rm. Few-words-'bout-today's-expedition. Island of Tenebrossa, small island, five miles off San Juan el Pirata. Old custom, two hundred years old—go there, hang a lot of convicts: dare say you've read it all up in your guide-books? And the custom goes on to this day. They don't really hang the fellers now," added the Major reassuringly, respectful of the delicate nerves of the memsahibs. "Got a sort of harness now, worn round their middles, dangle up there quite comfy, just pretending. Jump about a bit, though, as though they were hanging. Disagreeable business, hanging...."

"Back home in the States ..."

"... nearly as disagreeable as electrocution, I wouldn't be surprised," said the Major, neatly. But it had thrown him. "Er—where was I?"

"You were going to explain about the hoods," suggested Miss Cockrill in a voice of silk.

"Ah, yes, hoods. These chaps brought over here by a special vaporetto—Vaporetto of Death, it's called: say nine of 'em. All in hoods and sort of nightgowns; you know, à la Kloo Klux Klan. Nobody knowing who was who. Thing is, one of 'em was going to get off, only no one knew which—feller didn't know, himself. Forced to do a dance, just sort of shuffling around, you know: and shuffling's the word, because that's just what they were doing, shuffling themselves like a pack of cards and the other fellers, the hangmen fellers, just strung up the next that came along and the next.... Bets going on like billy-ho,

down in the arena below the hanging rock—who'll get away with it? and relatives hopping like sandfleas, of course, as each one went up, wondering, Is that our Willie? Finally—say nine fellers, like I said: eight hanging there, one left. Poor chap wearing the hood and all that, still didn't know what was happening: suddenly got hold of, shoved into a coffin, coffin fastened down, stood on end under the gallows—opened, hood pulled off, feller 'rose from the dead.' General sentiment of Don't do it again, and he got off scot free. If," said the Major with a rare moment of sentience, "you can call it scot free."

A boy came round, piping mellifluously, with a tray of wares: limonado, Juanello, carafes of the filthy red wine made on the island which, to the amazement of the native, the turisti were apparently willing to pay for and drink; and snacks—biscotti and toasti, and pizzi of fresh-baked dough strewn with anchovy and herbs and tomato, the hot cheese bubbling over all. There was a sharp argument with Fuddy-duddy who thought the hotel should be paying out for this refreshment, ending as usual in the Major diving a hand into his own tight pockets with mutterings about anything-for-peace.... Fuddydudddy, having won his point and made everyone unhappy and embarrassed, then said he didn't want any, anyway, it was the principle. Mr Bilson said that back home they would just drop into a drug-store and everything there would be covered in cellophane. Mrs Bilson made a note in her large black book, 'Isl. Tennerbrozzer, people hung in old days, sandwiches on boat, flies.' The woman novelist looked searchingly into the limpid eyes of the little boy carrying the tray. Miss Cockrill said that now perhaps Major Bull could go on?

"But that's all," said Major Bull.

"What about the dances?"

"Oh, well, yes, the dances." He gave her a look of reproach. "Yes. Well. Lot of dancing on the island. Everyone dead keen."

"I was reading last night," said Miss Cockrill in a loud cool, determined voice, "that nowadays dances commemorate all these old customs the Major has described to us. The young people dress up and execute them; like our Morris dancing, for example—er—back home. There is a special dance from the landing-place to the rock, the 'Dance to the Gallows'..."

"Come Haste to the Hanging," suggested Mr Cecil.

Miss Cockrill bent on him a humorously appreciative eye. "Exactly. And then, of course, there's the Shuffling Dance as the Major has called it." She paused, looking at their bear-leader as though, so far prompted, he surely might take up the cue.

Major Bull did not fail her. "By Jove, yes. And the 'Hanging Dance.' Fellers jiggling about in the air, you know, held up by these belts like I told you..."

"Meanwhile, individual groups are doing dances on their own: supposed to be relatives of the different men."

"Yes, by Jove, and then feller gets up out of the coffin and *he* does a dance. Relief you know. And then they all dance, everyone joins in, pleased as punch." Pleased as punch himself after this dispensation of cultural knowledge, the Major climbed down from his bollard, adjusted the round linen cap and stumped off in pursuit of the boy with the drinks. The lady novelist had him pinned against a stanchion and was putting him through a third degree examination as to his feelings for his father. As the small boy, being an orphan, kept reiterating only

'Innocento!' which she took to mean that they had been innocent (*most* disappointing!), they were not getting on very fast. The Major bought a drink for himself and offered one to Gruff who happened to be standing by; but she refused it brusquely—she could just about manage to buy her own drinks, she said, and was warmly applauded by Aunt Grim, who overheard all. "Jolly good! Old brute, I suppose he's After You," said Grim. All men were beasts.

Tenebrossa is so called because of the darkness which envelopes, or long ago enveloped, the victims of the gallows; for the hoods were as blindfolding to the wearers as impenetrable to spectators. The island was doubtless chosen originally as being perfect for the purpose of a spectacle. Composed largely of rock, its western side is lightly wooded with oleander and wild olive, but to the south-east it is bare as the mountains of the moon, hollowed out into a natural amphitheatre with only one great, flat rock jutting out into the arena. On this the old gallows still gauntly stand: a line of stout upright posts, once vividly decorated; with eight metal pulleys of antique design through which a rope could be jerked by hand, leaving the victim to strangle slowly, dancing as he died. The whole, on fiesta day, is gaily beflagged and beflowered as in days of yore, a carpet of petals, intricately patterned, leads from the landing stage to El Exaltida's private pavilion; every hummock is claimed as a picnic table, bright cloths are spread and soon piled high with colour—brown bread, red wine, pimientos scarlet and green, pale yellow folded omelettes, purple grapes. The women have abandoned the black cloaks and veils of the morning and both sexes in their fiesta costume are bright as humming birds: and indeed, the chatter and colour would outmatch the most crowded of tropical aviaries.

There is no such thing on the Domenica di Boia, as reserving a picnic pitch; but the Direttore of the hotel, by dint of sending a dozen of the heavier-built members of his staff, had held off all invaders of a site in the arena chosen by himself, and by one o'clock the party had taken possession; the grouppa (with Miss Cockrill, Winsome and Mr Cecil associate members) keeping themselves to themselves, the rest of the hotel guests as rigorously excluding *them*. At two o'clock, El Exaltida arrived.

The grand ducal barge drew up at the landing stage, resplendent in white and gold, with a gay, striped awning, and at once, as though a great flock of coloured birds arose from the ground, everybody stood up. After the sermon that morning, there was a great craning of necks to see if La Bellissima had come: and she was there, walking remote and cool, a little behind her husband with a grave face and downcast eyes. The Grand Duke was in fiesta dress: black knee-breeches, tremendously embroidered down the outside of the thigh, silk stockings, buckled shoes, and the great black cloak, the right corner taken up and thrown across the chest and over the left shoulder. La Bellissima too wore the national dress, adapted like Mr Cecil's in sophisticate circles: narrow, pale green satin embroidered all over with little white flowers, a veil of embroidered net hanging over her head and falling in two straight panels in front, to the hem of her dress. Behind them crept El Exaltida's secretary, a little grey jackal of a man, nicknamed by the Grand Duke 'Tabaqui' and so called throughout the island, though nobody else there had ever read any Kipling. The little French friends wriggled and giggled their way behind them, in anything but Juanese garb. In the rear of the procession came the court dignitaries, and El Patriarca in his

white serge soutane, blessing everyone, right, left and centre with a fine nonchalance as he passed; and El Obispo (but more moderately), doing the same. Of El Arcivescovo, there was no sign.

El Gerente was in splendid form that afternoon, dashing hither and thither in the official gym. shoes, cloak flying, sabre rattling, barking out orders to the confusion of all. Tomaso di Goya had come ashore with him but made no attempt to follow in his erratic wake, strolling about instead, looking Byronic, surrounded by a group of anarchistic young men, all talking eagerly but with a determined air of secrecy. He wore fiesta dress, brightly embroidered, but his pale face with the long nose and sharp black eyes was sombre and intent. When he saw Miss Cockrill and Winsome, however, he allowed it to brighten and, dismissing his followers, came towards them, bowing and hand-kissing with a wealth of graceful flourishes. Miss Cockrill asked after the snuffboxes.

Winsome had not kept a tentative appointment she had made with Tomaso di Goya on the previous evening. Awaking ill at ease in body and mind, she had in the cold light of morning viewed with something approaching horror the gay extravagances of the night before; and an all too rewarding search through Vol. I., for an undertaking, in Juanita's authentic, thin, sloping, purple hand, to send up a cloud of rosy incense on the forthcoming Fiesta di San Juan—which is also the national Day of Roses—did absolutely nothing to allay her anxiety. She sent round to the Joyeria a casual note: she had greatly enjoyed all their fun and *nonsense* (tremendously underlined), but perhaps a joke could go *too far*, and now they really mustn't be naughty any more! Meanwhile, her cousin insisted (most tiresomely!) upon some expedition, so she wouldn't be free, after all, to see the Cathedral treasures he had kindly offered to show her.... In pursuance of this resolution she had forced Cousin Hat to a day of mortification in the San Juan Museum, poring with passionate intensity over a vast number of objects of no virtue whatsoever except that they occupied her time; and on the evening ramble through the town, kept to Major Bull's side with so firm a resolution as to make that great lover for the first time wonder whether, by any chance ... But no, no. One or two of the older young things at the Heronsford tennis club made sheep's eyes at him still, it was true; and several of the unattached ladies in his party had been flatteringly kind. But ... An old buffer like him, grown white (not to mention red) in the service of his country, overseas.... It was impossible. And besides there was Hat.

Miss Cockrill, unaware of the inner uncertainties of her companions, meanwhile pursued idly the matter of the snuff-boxes. "Alas, Senora—who shall buy!" Unloaded now, and unpacked, they were stacked away, thousands of tiny crystal boxes crowding out all the storage place in his little shop; and no interest had been shown in the one in the window, none at all, though it had been priced at a figure hardly covering its cost, let alone the cost of the thousands that must remain unsold: no interest even from the turisti, even though for once they would really have been getting a bargain, even though the legend SMUGLED had been doubled in size, even though the inscription 'Mad in San Juan' had been copied out in five different languages on pieces of cardboard, and dotted all about. The end of the season and his profits all gone in this one undertaking.... "Alas, Senora—no buone, my poor snuff-boxes." He produced one, however, from his pocket, done up in a twist of tissue paper. "But I have brought one—for

the Senorita." He handed it to Winsome looking into her face with limpid eyes.

"For me?" She stammered and lost colour. "Why for me?"

Tomaso had spent half the night poring over tiny sketches, no sooner perfected and memorised than destroyed; and now his plans were advanced and he had need of a fellow conspirator again; had need also of one so far implicated that she would keep ever silent, not for his sake but for her own. He looked back at her blandly. "A gift, Senorita. For the Senorita del Opale—to keep her opal in."

"To keep my ... But I couldn't..." She explained, stammering wretchedly: "Senor di Goya has fallen in love with my ring."

"And would like to see it happily housed—when it has not the greater happiness to be on the Senorita's finger." He bowed and flourished and, tearing the last wrapping from the box, pressed it warmly into her helpless hand. "Accept it, Senorita. It is alas! of no value to me—except to give to the Senorita for her opal." And by the way, he added, and this time looked directly into her face and permitted himself an infinitesimal wink, she would not forget that she had expressed a desire to see the thurible—the Collini thurible—before it was put away after its fiesta appearance this morning. He had arranged with the Archbishop, all was in readiness. Tomorrow? At eleven, perhaps? He would see to it, make a definite appointment: would see her later this evening and confirm it... No trouble at all, a pleasure, a happiness: only, having put the Arcivescovo to some little exertion on her behalf, he must beg that the Senorita would keep the appointment, *she would not let him down*. ...? Smiling and flourishing, he kissed hands all round, and with a last naughty glance from the sloe-black, gipsy eyes, drifted off again. "These people will go to any lengths," said Cousin Hat, lost in wonder, gazing after him, "to get one to go into their shops and buy."

Meanwhile, mention of the censer had raised in the Major a thirst to dispense further knowledge. "H'rm, h'rm. If-I-could-have-y'r-attentions-one-moment." He leapt agilely on to a small rock hummock that formed the centre of the picnicking group and stood there looking like a mountain goat crowned with the white linen hat. "Ought to have told you. 'Bout that thurible. Gold, you know. Made by feller called Bellini."

"Cellini," said Miss Cockrill.

Major Bull took a dekko at the book of the words and by Jove, there *was* a Bellini. "Yes, we all know that, Dick, but the thurible was made by Cellini. And you don't pronounce it thurible."

"To say thurible," said Mr Cecil, "is turrible." Of course to say horrible, he added thoughtfully, would be even more horrible....

Miss Cockrill caught the infection. "And to say thorible——"

"Deplorable!"

"In fact, to be endurable——"

"You have to say thurible."

The Major privately considered that if anything were deplorable it was that before embarking on the subject, he had not taken the precaution of another Quiet Talk with Hat. "Yes. H'rm. Very amusin'. Thing is, this thing was made by this feller Cellini, Bellini, whoever it was, for old Jewan himself."

"My dear Dick!"

"It being well known," said the Major hastily and for once correctly, "that old

Jewan erected the cathedral to his own honour, years before he died.”

“But not two hundred years before. Cellini....”

“All *right*, Hat. Well, there you are,” said the Major, puffing and blowing, “ ’s all I wanted to tell you. Interestin’ bit of history, what?” He climbed down from his eminence and was immediately set upon by the Back-Homes with the claims of the Forest Lawns cemetery to all thuribles made by Cellini and by Bellini too; and released only by the demands of the two suffering ladies to be shown the way without delay to the excusados. Mr Cecil had christened them D. and V.

After the collatione, the siesta; even in September, the afternoon sun is fierce and nothing really begins before five o’clock. Picnic baskets ringed the family pitches in the arena, as the people made for the woody grove; soon everyone was asleep, sprawled unashamedly in the shade of oleander and olive, the children lying like litters of puppies, their heads pillowed comfortably on their mothers’ humped, rounded thighs. Up in the pavilion, a little miracle in itself of polished white marble, the only man-made thing (except for the painted gallows) on the island, El Exaltida lay, magnificent in sleep as in waking, the splendid head with its curling black hair on a pillow of embroidered silk, the great limbs relaxed on a cool marble couch covered with cloth of gold; a girl playing a zither very softly on the floor at his feet. Outside, Tabaqui, the grey secretary, was in a fever of activity, organising the pink champagne, sugared almonds, sweet chestnuts, green figs and innumerable gelati, any or none of which the Grand Duke might demand upon waking—nothing elaborate, mind, for the whole thing was a picnic and simplicity the keynote. “Suppose he asks for the dogs? Has anyone brought the dogs?” Nobody had brought the dogs but mercifully a small boy was spotted, curled up in sleep with a creature of the same breed as El Exaltida’s, and if necessary this animal could be produced: the Grand Duke asked for his dogs very seldom and then only through caprice, and would never know the difference. “And Cristallo, is someone looking after Cristallo?” Cristallo was currently the favourite cat, inevitably white but wearing a collar of pearls with his blue ribbon bow. Being a cat, he was very efficiently looking after himself.

In her apartment next door to the Grand Duke’s in the little pavilion, La Bellissima, however, was wide awake. She arose and went to the doorway and looked out at the groves of olive trees. “Senor Tabaqui!”

“Bellissima?”

She said in French: “I wish to walk down through the trees to that little stream. Must I take a guard?”

He went even greyer than usual. “But, Bellissima——!”

“Who would harm me?”

He shifted his eyes. “No one, of course, Bellissima Bienquista—Most Lovely and Much Belovéd.... But it is due to your position, you cannot go without a guard.”

“And a woman?”

“At least two of your ladies.”

“Tell them to keep back, then,” she said. “Tell them not to press round me. I want to be alone a little.” Without further ado, she walked quietly away from him, down through the olive groves and the sleeping groups to the little stream. Her guard sprang to arms, shuffled their feet hurriedly into their sand-shoes and

slouched down after her. The secretary spoke to the women and they followed, keeping their distance. These foreigners, they said among themselves, who had no respect for the siesta hour!—nor did they trouble to subdue their voices for she could not understand a word.

A woman was sitting at the edge of the stream, who did not move as she approached; such commoners as had awakened to see her pass, had scrambled hurriedly to their feet and humbly taken themselves off. Her guard ran before her. “Go! Depart! You can’t stay here.”

She was an elderly lady with a squashed straw hat and carrying a large green-lined parasol. “Go?” she said. “Certainly not.”

“You must leave at once, you cannot be allowed to remain.”

“Nonsense,” said the elderly lady. She added loudly: “English. Inghlesi. No comprendo.”

“But you must go. La Bellissima is coming: be good enough, Senora, to retire immediately.”

“Oh, well, that’s different,” said Miss Cockrill, reverting immediately to quite fluent Juanese. She looked past the guard and for the first time saw the Grand Duchess. “I beg your pardon,” she said, getting up to her feet and doing a little bob. “If I’d known it was your Highness ... Milles—er—milles regrets...”

La Bellissima stood staring at her for a moment. “Madame—un moment, s’il vous plait. Vous parlez-Français?”

“Ern per,” said Miss Cockrill; an overstatement.

“Vous etes Anglaise?”

“Onglaise, oui, certainmong.”

“Et bien ...” She thought it over and made up her mind. “Ayez la gentillesse, Madame, de vous assesoir un petit moment; et parler avec moi.” Her small hand waved imperiously, the attendants melted back thankfully into the shade of the olive trees, and she sat down, all in her satins and laces, on the grass beside the stream. “Asseyez vous, Madame, je vous en prie.”

“Mademoiselle,” corrected Miss Cockrill, obediently sitting down too.

“Pardon: Mad’moiselle.” She sat for a little while, looking down into the water, her hands very still in her silk-embroidered lap. She said at last, always in French: “May I ask your name?”

“My name is Harriet Cockrill, Bellissima.”

“Miss Cockrill? But was not that ...?”

“The inspector, yes: he’s my brother.”

“El Exaltida thinks highly of Inspector Cockrill.”

Cousin Hat bowed as gracefully as is possible for a middle-aged lady sitting on the ground, and struggled to convey that her brother had a deep respect for El Exaltida: which in fact was not strictly true.

“And you, Mademoiselle—do you know the Grand Duke?”

Miss Cockrill had not the honour of a personal acquaintance with His Highness.

“In that case ...” She paused for a moment, pondering, “Mademoiselle—if you should later meet my husband—you would have the great goodness not to repeat what I may say to you?”

“Si vous voulez parlez un petit peu plus lontimong?”

The Grand Duchess repeated it slowly. But it seemed an odd request, for all

that she wanted, apparently, was a little grounding in English history: the Tudors especially. “Your King Henry VIII...”

“Honry weetiaime?—oh, yes, the eighth. Yes, him?”

“He had a wife called Anne?”

“Unn?” said Miss Cockrill. “Oh, Anne. Oui. Unn Boleyn.”

“She—died? She had her head cut off by her husband? But, Mademoiselle—why?”

On the whole Miss Cockrill supposed, it was because of Queen Elizabeth. Being a girl, she meant: or rather, not being a boy.

“This is what my husband told me, yes. But—only because it was a baby girl her husband chopped off her head?”

Of course, said Miss Cockrill hurriedly, in defence of her country, that couldn’t happen nowadays.

“Not in England,” said La Bellissima.

So that was it! After the sermon, a little connubial chat between husband and wife. Embarrassed at having so easily penetrated the gossamer veil of the Grand Duchess’s reticence, Cousin Hat essayed to repair the damage with a thread of a different hue. “Of course that may have been only an excuse of the King’s. There was another girl mixed up in it.”

“Another daughter?”

No, no, anything but that: another jeune fille, a jeune fille très jolie, one of the ladies-in-waiting on the Queen, as once Anne herself had been. Catherine Howard, her name had been—or was it Jane Seymour? Anyway, she herself had in turn been beheaded for having an affair with a page: or was that the other one?

“Une ‘page’?”

“Les petits garçons avec des boutons,” said Miss Cockrill, making a series of rapid little dabs down the front of her dress (a most incomprehensible business, she had always thought, and surely Henry *must* have been misinformed ...?)

The Grand Duchess could be seen to be mentally reviewing the young ladies in attendance on herself: what she saw did not visibly discourage her further, but she was plainly still puzzled. “Mademoiselle—let me confide in you a little, let me ask you to help me, to explain something to me: and give me your word, which I know to an English lady is sacred, that you will say nothing to anyone of what I may tell you.”

Miss Cockrill licked her finger, crossed her heart and wished to die, all in French.

“Well, then, this morning ... But no, I will go further back than that. Mademoiselle, at home in Paris, my family is well born; rich enough, well placed in the world—but not extravagantly so. And this is important for two reasons: it means that the Grand Duke had no material reason to choose me as his wife: he chose me—I must say it with simplicity—only for my beauty. He saw me at a reception, he went at once to my father, merely walked across the room to my father and said, ‘Sir, you have a very beautiful daughter. Have I your permission to pay my addresses to her?’ My father of course agreed. He said afterwards that the Grand Duke seemed so large, suddenly appearing towering over him there—though my father himself is a very big man—that he dared not say anything else; but of course he would have agreed anyway, it was a great match for me. But ...

You see what this means? He married me because I was beautiful, because I came of a tall and generally handsome family—and it is his business to produce tall and handsome heirs; and once I have produced his heirs for him, there is no one very much to enquire what becomes of me; just a middle-class family, no great power of aristocracy, of politics, of wealth.” Her nervous lingers cropped at the yellow flowers in the green grass all about her, she tossed a handful of them into the stream and watched them, like little gilded boats, float merrily away. “I do not speak too fast? You have understood?”

Miss Cockrill had understood perhaps one quarter. The Grand Duke had married her only because she was beautiful: well, men did that kind of thing. And whatever arrived to her, her family could do nothing about it. As to what might arrive—there were further rapid and only half-comprehended explanations. Her mother, or ‘la mère’ as La Bellissima appeared to prefer to call her, had apparently warned her daughter of what she might expect once her function was fulfilled. The same thing, after all, had happened to the last Grand Duchess once Juan Lorenzo himself had been born and a couple of supporting brothers to insure the inheritance; and before that to no less than three of the Grand Duke Pedro’s wives; and before that again ... Despatched: mysteriously dead, as soon as the succession had been established; with a harem of pretty dancing girls to take their place.

“But—murdered?” said Miss Cockrill, absolutely aghast.

What else? The little Duchess threw up her hands and a shower of grass and petals fell all about her. This was not twentieth-century England or France: this was San Juan el Pirata where life was held cheap and no one enquired very closely into Palace affairs, and after all, what Lorenzo’s own father had done, that surely he might do too ...? “One child, Mademoiselle, perhaps two—and then, when my figure is ruined, my skin is coarse, I have ugly veins in my legs ...”

“My dear child, who has been talking to you?”

The Grand Duchess shrugged. These truths were self-evident. Her mother had said ...

It seemed very odd to Miss Cockrill that a mother, whose convictions apparently amounted to an almost certain pre-knowledge of the Grand Duke’s intentions, should have encouraged so exceedingly parlous a match; she appeared, at any rate, zealous in advising her daughter against premature maternity. “The day a son is born to me, Mademoiselle, that day my death warrant is signed.”

“And, on the other hand—if you don’t have a child?”

“I suppose,” said the Grand Duchess wistfully, “that that is where your Jane Seymour comes in.”

“I see,” said Miss Cockrill. But she did not see very clearly; and she wished she had learnt more French.

“In San Juan, the people are very backward, few of them read or write; they learn very much still by parables and signs. I think that my husband has spoken to me today in a parable. Mademoiselle, after Mass, he was angry, he was in one of his rages and his rages are—a little frightening. He handed me into the carriage, at the Duomo door; and as we drove back to the palace, he recited to me, without preamble, the history of your Anne Boleyn. This parable, you have

interpreted for me. Anne Boleyn gave her husband no heir; therefore he must marry someone who would; therefore she died."

Of course in the case of Anne Boleyn, insisted Miss Cockrill, uncomfortably, the business of the heir had been something of an excuse; there had already been a Jane Seymour at hand.

"In my case there is—as yet—no Jane Seymour."

"And no heir either?"

"Nor will there be. If I am to die, I will not die ugly and worn out, having served my turn." She tossed the last of her flower boats into the stream and watched it borne away on the ripples to be lost at last in some miniature tempest, far, far out to sea; and, dusting her pale hands of the pollen that exactly matched her bright hair, she repeated: "There is so far no Jane Seymour, Mademoiselle; but I think you will find it is only a matter of time."

"Now, you listen to me, my child ..." said Cousin Hat.

The long, hot afternoon wore on. Up in the marble pavilion, the Grand Duke slept and the girl played softly on the zither at his feet; down by the stream the Duchess sat with eyes like saucers on the flower-starred grass and listened to Cousin Hat; decorously composed with their backs against olive tree trunks the Major and his flock reposed, disturbed only by the sudden sorties of D. and V.: a little apart, Winsome Foley huddled in dismay and tried to make light to herself of the follies of the evening before. *'You will not forget, Senorita, that you have an appointment with the Archbishop, to see the thurible: you will not let me down?'* I must have been insane, she thought. I must have been insane....

Beneath opposing oleanders, Pepita Bussaca and Innocenta lay, drowsing in the heat, two full-blown roses each in her court of lesser flowers. To Innocenta came a messenger, stepping delicately among the recumbent forms. She rose, startled, hurriedly composed her dress and went off with him. They returned twenty minutes later and she woke Lorena in her turn and sent her off with the messenger. Here and there a sleepy eye opened, observed with hazy interest, these goings on, and heavily closed again. Pepita, however, disturbed by Lorena's going and perceiving her friend to be awake, left the sleeping Gerente and their daughters and beckoned Innocenta to join her for a chat. She was in great trouble about her Giulietta who wanted to go on the stage....

"On the stage?" said Innocenta, incredulous.

"She wants to learn Italian, have a training in Milano, and finally go on the stage."

"Impossible, my dear. Unthinkable. The stage is no life for a girl."

"Ah, if you would but have taken her last year, Innocenta!"

"It would not have done, Pepita, she was too—was too ..." Was too knock-kneed, poor child, thought Innocenta, whose kind heart had bled at having to turn her down. But the stage! "Perhaps, after all, when I get rid of Inez ..."

"It is too late now, her heart is set on it; and what's more, I believe she has infected Manuela. Poor Guido, he is beside himself with anxiety." Pepita looked over proudly to where the huge heap of the Gerente de Politio snored dreamlessly amongst his vexatious daughters. "But you, Innocenta—you do not look happy either."

Innocenta was not only not happy, she was seriously alarmed and she longed for a confidante. "If I tell you, Pepita, you will not repeat it to a soul? But then,

you couldn't—for your Guido also is involved."

"My Guido?"

"Listen, Pepita. Half an hour ago, a messenger came for me: from—guess! But you never could guess. From the Grand Duke himself."

"Innocenta!"

"I went to the pavilion. Imagine how I felt, Pepita! He was there with Tabaqui. He said nothing, just bowed his head."

"He never speaks, not to ordinary people like us."

"Tabaqui said that the Grand Duke wished me to send a girl to the palace; he would keep her there some time, some weeks perhaps. He asked who I would suggest. Well, you know, Pepita, I'd been thinking of letting Inez go. This seemed the opportunity. I suggested, 'Inez Canillo.' The Grand Duke wrote on a piece of paper. Tabaqui read it and said: 'El Exaltida wants a well-behaved young woman, not such a one as Inez Canillo.' Imagine, Pepita!—what these people know! They know everything."

"No wonder you said just now that you would get rid of Inez."

"Yes, and what a reference *she* will take with her!—dismissed because her deportment has been such as to attract the attention of El Exaltida himself. It's in church, you know, they've seen her ogling the touristi."

"Well, so anyway, the Grand Duke would not have Inez?"

"Exactly. And so ... Pepita, what I did was innocent, I thought only of what girl I best could spare ..."

"Lorenna?"

"Well, of course. It seemed to settle all my problems. And the Grand Duke agreed at once, he bowed his head—really Pepita, near-to he is magnificent!—and snapped his fingers and a guard came and I made my reverence and came away. Tabaqui said that he would arrange terms with me later and tell me when Lorenna would be wanted at palace; and meanwhile to send her back with the messenger." She looked at her friend, her round face quite haggard with terror. "She has gone—it is too late to draw back; and now, Pepita, I realise what I have done."

Pepita looked blank.

"Tomaso," prompted Innocenta.

"Tomaso di Goya? He will not like it, I suppose ..."

"Will not like it: he will be delighted with it. And so," said Innocenta, heavy with direful significance, "will your Guido."

"My Guido? What has he to do with Lorenna?"

"Say, rather, what has he to do with Tomaso di Goya? Ah, Pepita, you don't hear Tomaso holding forth, evening after evening, in the salon, up at the Colombaia...."

"Certainly not," said Pepita, primly.

Not to mention your precious husband, thought Innocenta, nettled; but true to a strict code of etiquette, said nothing aloud. "And you know very well that your Guido and Tomaso di Goya are thick as thieves."

"They are together in a business deal."

"Business deal—nonsense!" said Innocenta. "That Tomaso is a firebrand of the very worst sort and he has your stupid husband on a piece of string. And Lorenna, too, silly girl, filling up her head with nonsense about taxes and tyranny

and the rights of the people. The rights of the people! What rights have people got? To breathe, that's all."

"And to eat and drink, Innocenta, and to be happy, to dance and to sing...."

"All this we may do if we work. Does the Grand Duke stop people from working?"

The Grand Duke not infrequently stopped people from breathing but fortunately for the duration of this high political argument, the fact did not occur to either lady. "In any event, what has this to do with my Guido?"

"Your Guido is plotting and scheming with Tomaso, day and night. The Joyeria is left to a boy to look after, El Gerente's ships he idle at the quay, his men have nothing to occupy them but their police duties. And what," said Innocenta darkly, "is the object of their plotting?" Her sweet round face screwed itself into an expression of angry foreboding, her bright eyes stared accusingly into the eyes of her friend. "It is my belief, Pepita, that Tomaso di Goya and your Guido are doing nothing less than plot the assassination of the Grand Duke."

Every vestige of colour drained from Pepita's face. "The assassination ...? Of the Grand ...?" She looked round her in terror as though the very olives might suddenly sprout green ears and tongues and scuttle off piping out the news. "Per Dios, Innocenta, don't speak such words out loud!"

"I tell you, Pepita, it is true: a revolution."

"Innocenta, my Guido is Chief of the Police!"

"Who more able to promote a revolution? He commands the only trained men in the island. Not," said Innocenta, loftily, "that your Guido will promote the revolution or anything else, either. He will be permitted to assist; it is Tomaso di Goya who will lead, my dear, and place himself, when your Guido has done the work and taken the risks, in the Grand Duke's place: and a fine ruler we shall have then, thanks to your Guido—Tomaso di Goya, a no-good malcontent whose mother was an unmarried gipsy from the mainland; descendant of a tuppenny painter on the run from Spain. But this Tomaso has a tongue, Pepita, they say even the Arcivescovo listens to him, with his talk of the good of the people and equal wealth.... And your Guido is under his thumb. And so, also," said Innocenta, ready to faint at the recollection of it, "so, also, is Loreнна."

"Loreнна! At the palace ...!"

"Tomaso di Goya is plotting to assassinate the Grand Duke," said Innocenta. "And Loreнна will do whatever Tomaso tells her. And *I* have recommended Loreнна to the Grand Duke."

Loreнна approached them, walking down softly through the twisted olive trees, under the misty veil of their silver leaves. She was very lovely, slender as a reed, her mouth like geranium petals, her eyes bright and dark as the eyes of all Juanese girls: her hair was pulled sleekly against her head and caught into a great knot at the nape of her neck, ringed with tiny red flowers. Innocenta started up and caught at her wrist. "It is arranged?"

"Si, Senora."

No respite then. "You saw the Grand Duke himself?"

"Yes. And Tabaqui. Tabaqui spoke. He said I should be some weeks at the palace. He said he would arrange things with you; but I also should be well paid. He said I should speak to no one of where I was going." A great tear gathered, teetered, spilled over and rolled down a cheek of ivory. "Oh, Senora Innocenta—

what will my Tomaso say?"

Evidently no thought of playing Charlotte Corday had as yet, at any rate, penetrated Loreнна's charming head; which also was of ivory, reputed solid right through. "If the Grand Duke has told you to tell no one ..."

"Of course I must tell Tomaso."

"But El Exaltida, himself ..."

"It was not El Exaltida himself, only Tabaqui. The Grand Duke said nothing. Or only at the end. It was very odd. He looked me up and down when I came in, he listened for a moment while I replied to Tabaqui; but after that he seemed not interested, he had a cat there and he was playing with it. The cat had a collar of pearls, Senora Innocenta, better than anything Tomaso has at the Joyeria ... And then ... Tabaqui called to the guard, the guard came back, Tabaqui stood up and said good-bye to me, and I made my reverence to the Grand Duke. And then the Grand Duke spoke at last, he said, 'Your duties will be light. You will be in attendance ...' I cannot have caught it aright, Senor Innocenta, it sounded as though he said, 'on the Grand Duchess.'"

"You certainly cannot have heard aright," said Innocenta.

"And then he said, 'Arrivaderci,' and a name. Not my name; not even a Juanese name. I'm not even sure it was a name, except for the way he said it. It sounded," said Loreнна, as though he said, 'Arrivaderci, Jane Seymour.'"

CHAPTER EIGHT

By five o'clock the island was all alert again, the picnic sites reoccupied, bottles of limonado had been brought from the cool shade, there were baskets of sweetmeats, sugared chestnuts, almonds in honey, little cream cheeses set out on green fig leaves, to eat with little ginger cakes ... The sun shone merrily overhead no longer oppressively hot, the rim of the arena was banked with oleander, silver and pink and green. El Exaltida came out from his pavilion with La Bellissima at his side, both in their gay fiesta dress, two magical figures removed from the cares of everyday man: the people waved and cheered and they bowed unsmilingly back. There was a faint, faraway hooting, a drift of music across the dancing waters of the Mediterranean; and, black as a threat, a blot of doom between blue sea and blue sky, the Vaporetto de Muerte hove into sight. The fun had begun.

The Vaporetto de Muerte plies, in the ordinary way, between Puerto de Barrequitas and the mainland of Italy where the Juanese burying grounds are. In the long ago days, when a couple of B-class galleons could starve out the island in as many weeks, every inch of the land on San Juan el Pirata was of value, and land which could be dug to the depth of a grave, of incalculable worth. Lacking space for a burial site, therefore, San Juan had applied to Italy for rental in perpetuity of a suitable patch, northof Piombino; and this being refused, resorted with immediate success to a delicate piece of blackmail: having happily discovered a current which could be relied upon to deposit a corpse, in not less than five days from its launching, at the very spot selected for the cemetery. The necessity of transporting the dead by sea has resulted in the Vaporetto de Muerte, the Ship of Death; which, splendid with black plumes and bunting and hung all about with elaborately beaded wreaths, toots its way back and forth from the mainland upon this errand alone. On the Hangman's Sabbath, however, it is pressed into service, its resident band lugubriously playing, as conveyance for the 'condemned.'

If El Gerente de Politio was indeed anxious for the assassination of the Grand Duke, he was at least assiduous to prevent its marring the pleasures of that day. His men, resplendent in blue cloaks and flat, black, circular hats, sped hither and thither in their dirty sand-shoes, administering the law with the butts of their silver-chased rifles, which could slap or jab according to how they were presented. By this means, a broad lane was formed from the landing-stage to the gallows and along this, dreadfully dancing, the nine hooded men and their

gaolers, masked, made their way. They were covered, as the Major had promised, from head to foot in black, with cone-shaped hoods dropped over their heads, their hands manacled with chains so heavy that they could barely lift them in the dance. The dances themselves were impromptu, the dancers choosing steps and movements indicative of reluctance to approach the gibbets, and terror at approaching dissolution, but otherwise improvising. The little band ground out a funeral dirge of desolate tunelessness that mingled with the moans and groans of the victims, the laughter of the spectators. The crowd was delighted, shouting and clapping, helping on the blinded and stumbling felons with thumps on the back or ticklings of their chained, bare feet with pieces of stick or ferrules of parasols. In the body of the arena, the 'relatives' of the condemned, danced in sympathy at the approach of their loved ones, feigning acute distress. From the gallows, nine nooses spelled out a welcome, dangling from their scarred old posts in the gentle breeze.

Clustered about the Major, the turisti looked on, half-appalled, half-entertained. Not so long ago, these men would have been real people, real felons, really convicted, on their way to abominable death; one could not help wondering if the fun then had been any less whole-hearted; and doubting that it had. The Major, urged on by Miss Cockrill, barked out a running commentary on events. "Climbing up to the rock now. Group of 'relatives' trying to drag one feller back. 'Nother old chap—can't make it—guards prodding him on. Wonder what he's supposed to have done?" ruminated Major Bull: the crimes for which death was—indeed, still is—the penalty on the island of San Juan, are many and various and are listed, as the Major had discovered to his great delight, in a large book in the museum which makes delicious, though gruesome, reading. "'Shuffling dance' now. Choosing which to hang first. Just listen to the next of kin!"

From the marble terrace of their pavilion, the Grand Duke and Duchess looked down, indifferently. On the top of the gallows rock, the guards chased their half-blinded victims in a sort of a grand chain of ordered pursuit; at the foot of the rock, little bands of people danced their despair, alternately howling with pretended grief or uncontrollable laughter, as each outdid the other in extremes of sensibility. A victim was chosen, capered his last regrets beneath the dangling noose, was suddenly hauled up high and there danced the air to the delighted screams of the audience till at last, exhausted, he subsided with a few dying jerks and hung, turning gently in the breeze, his head lolling sideways in a parody of death. A second victim was selected and a third and a fourth. Any tedium of repetition was relieved by the variety and vigour of the rope-end dances, the actors being accorded prizes dependent on the public acclamation their efforts received. Had Major Bull been consulted, all would have been equally rewarded: his applause was deafening. "Really, Dick!" said Miss Cockrill, divided between disgust and laughter. Winsome Foley turned away her head and thought upon the life to come.

The last but one of the malefactors danced himself to death and hung with his fellows, his head lolling on his shoulder, softly turning from side to side in unison with them. The band ceased abruptly to play; a hush fell on the multitude standing staring up at the rock where, in the sudden silence, the masked guard closed in upon the one remaining figure, standing solitary, waiting. Blinded, half-

deafened by the enveloping hood, he was thrust into a wooden coffin and the lid closed. In an absolute soundlessness, the coffin was lifted to the shoulders of the guards; beneath the swinging figures of the dead, the living dead was paraded at funeral pace. A violin played a single note, piercing and terrible, wailing forth into the sunlit air, and the note was taken up by a thousand voices in a keening hum of lamentation. In the midst of life, we are in death: in the midst of jubilation, a host of people in a mounting of mass hysteria no less acute for its annual repetition, were suddenly made aware that what they knew quite well to be untrue, was true; that what they knew to be a farce, was terrible reality; that what they knew to be a live man playing a game of cat and mouse with life, was a dead man whose only hope lay in resurrection, ... In one great, forward, downward surge of movement, with a left-to-right, up-and-down fluttering of hands, they crossed themselves and fell upon their knees.

The guards placed the coffin. Tipped up on end, it stood in the centre of the gallows beneath the one empty noose: to each side of it, hung four dead or dying men. The crowd held its breath. In one moment, El Gerente de Politio, cloaked, sabred and masked, would step forward, throw upon the coffin and tear the hood aside, so that all might see who it was that had escaped from the very embraces of death.

El Gerente stepped forward. The coffin lid was flung open, the robed and hooded figure was visible, propped up, leaning back against the floor of the coffin. El Gerente put out his hand to strip away the hood: and into the absolute silence, a voice said, almost in a whisper and yet carrying to the furthestmost corner of the arena: "Wait!"

The secretary, Tabacqui, moved quietly forward; with soft, unhurried gestures of his grey hands, he pushed aside the startled guards and made a lane for his master. El Exaltida strode up to the coffin, his head brushing the feet of the hanging men. With one great hand, he caught the robed figure by the front of its gown, half lifted it out of the coffin and dropped it to its knees at his feet. The secretary intoned in his soft, carrying voice: "The message of El Exaltida, Juan Lorenzo, Hereditary Grand Duke of San Juan el Pirata to the people of this island —*'Next time there will be no resurrection!'* " The Grand Duke, as though at a given signal, tore aside the hood: and, grey-white, half fainting, hideously scarred, the piteous, ruined old face of El Arcivescovo stared out across the heads of the people. The Grand Duke jerked him to his feet again and said in a voice of thunder and lightning, "Very well. Dance!"

Down in the heart of the arena, surrounded by all the gay holiday-makers in their bright clothes, stricken silent, staring up with horrified eyes—Mr Cecil stood appalled. A drop scene! A Cecil B. de Mille epic in Glorious Tech., the ring of oleander under the blue sky, broken only by the marble minarets of the little pavilion; the barren bowl of the arena packed full with supers at so many dollars a day, all ready to raise stained brown arms and cry, Rhubarb! Rhubarb! at a sign from the cheer-leader outside camera-range. And, centre stage, the built-up platform of cardboard rock with its formal pattern of swinging dummies on opposed octagonals of post and cross-beams, black against blue, blue sky: the dark hump of the coffin centring an arrangement in black and grey, the black of the Grand Duke's costume, brightly embroidered, the grey of the grey secretary,

the black-and-grey of the tottering old man, black robed and ashen faced. But—it was not a drop-scene. It was real. A real sun smiled down upon real flowers, ringing in real people with real hearts, real tears of pity: and on the rock, a real man, old and dying, tottered and trembled and a real man stood and cried, ‘Dance!’ with uplifted hand. “Goodness,” said Mr Cecil’s high voice, piping across the heads of the people, standing all white-faced, silently looking on. “Not quite Winchester, would one say?”

The Grand Duke paused, for a long, long moment his hand still held in the air. Nor did he lower it. He clicked his fingers as though he had raised his hand for no other reason, and, without change of expression, said to El Gerente: “Take him aside,” and to the secretary, “Read.” He folded his arms beneath the black cloak and stood looking out over the people’s heads, as Tabaqui read.

“El Exaltida, Juan Lorenzo, Hereditary Grand Duke of San Juan el Pirata—to be read in sight and hearing of the people of San Juan el Pirata: to His Serenity, the Most Reverend, Most Venerable, Most Excellent, Most Noble, the Archbishop of San Juan.... Whereas it pleased His Serenity to preach this day a sermon, in sight and hearing of the people of San Juan el Pirata, publicly questioning the decisions and actions of the Grand Duke himself: the Grand Duke decrees as follows—His Serenity the Archbishop demands first an heir to the Dukedom of San Juan, and secondly that application be made to Rome for beatification and canonisation of Juanita di Perli, called El Margherita; declaring that Juanita di Perli lived the life of a saint and in life and after death has shown miraculous powers. Let El Margherita, then, show her powers now; and let His Serenity the Archbishop rest his faith in this alone. On the feast of San Juan, in three days’ time from now, El Exaltida will go publicly to the cathedral and there with the Grand Duchess, pray for an heir. At that hour, let El Margherita give some sign, let her give some miraculous sign that the gift will be granted. Let her do this and the Grand Duke will apply forthwith to Rome for recognition of her sanctity. Let her fail and, for his presumption and as a warning to each and every person here who dares even in his heart to question the Grand Duke’s authority—the Archbishop dies. Within one hour of the Grand Duke’s leaving the Duomo, if Juanita fails to uphold the Archbishop’s faith in her, his body will be shown to the people, confined as it has been shown just now: and the Grand Duke repeats that this time *there will be no resurrection*.” The secretary took a step backward, folded the paper neatly between nimble fingers and waited with bowed head. The Grand Duke stood in absolute silence for a moment; and then strode back to the pavilion and disappeared. The Archbishop presumably taking this as permission to give way to demands of nature only less pressing than those of the Grand Duke’s dignity, duly gave way and tumbled in a dead faint on the ground. Miss Cockrill, looking on from the safe circle of the tourist, thought of the old, grey wolf, Akela, on the council rock and of Shere Khan, the tiger; and watched where one jackal slunk off after its master—and another crept up to the fallen leader whose leadership was done. Tomaso di Goya, thrusting aside other offers of assistance, knelt down and gathered the old man into his merciless arms.

To do Tomaso justice, it had never till this moment occurred to him to murder the Grand Duke Lorenzo. That his powers should be curbed—yes: some share in the lesser authority falling, naturally, in his, Tomaso’s, way. That his wealth

should be broken up and distributed—yes: some of this also accruing to the distributor. But by political revolution, peaceful or otherwise, and by this alone; that Juan Lorenzo should die, let alone that Tomaso should reign in his place—in this Innocenta's imagination had far outstripped Tomaso's ambition. Now, however ... Lorennna had hastily imparted her secret, before the ceremonies began, and for the first time a personal hate for the tyrant sprang up where only hatred for tyranny had been. His affection for Lorennna, always quite genuine, took on new attributes of tenderness, of jealousy, of a physical possessiveness: the fact that, though fearful of his reactions, she could not conceal an inward elation at promise of her coming promotion, did nothing to endear the Grand Duke to her lover's heart. And now—now, through a coincidence almost miraculous in itself, at the very moment when his political hatred took on a personal tone, an instrument of vengeance was thrust into his hand. The Grand Duke demanded a sign from heaven; and he, Tomaso, had, locked away in the secrecy of his brain alone, a blueprint of a 'sign from heaven,' and planned for the selfsame day. A swinging thurible, a tiny trapdoor cunningly concealed—a cloud of rosy incense rising, sweet-scented, up to the glittering shadows of mosaic domes.... He could have laughed aloud at the innocence of that pretty conception that an hour ago had seemed daring in the extreme. It should be no perfumed pellet that lay concealed beneath the gold trapdoor. The Grand Duke had asked Juanita for a sign: Juanita should send him a sign indeed.

Belly to the ground, the jackal crept up to the council rock; and gathered the fallen old wolf into the toils of a plan so new and so terrible that his own mind rocked at the thought of it.

CHAPTER NINE

To say that the touristi were having a lovely time would be to exaggerate.

The Juanese, to whom such scenes were merely the highlights of everyday life, soon bounced back to jollity again, the eight hanged bodies were cut down, somewhat stiff from prolonged suspension in their harnesses; everyone fell to eating and drinking once more. For the Archbishop's fate, little lasting concern was aroused. If he died, why, he was old and one had to die one day—people died for smaller crimes than flouting the Grand Duke's authority. But anyway, he would not die....

For Juanita, of course, would give the sign: and what form the sign would take, whether the Grand Duchess would be granted her prayer, how soon Rome would arrange for the canonisation, and who among themselves might most delightfully benefit when all these wonders came about—these formed the only animating topics in a conversation that centred, naturally, on the events of the day. The limonado bottles disappeared, the bottles of arguadiente came out, upon the gallows-rock the band struck up a more lively tune and in the cool of the evening the real dancing began. Only the unsmiling touristi seemed heavy at heart; and the Juanese watched in astonishment as, still sick and shaken, in twos and threes they wandered about and tried to recapture the fiesta spirit of the day.

Major Bull and Miss Cockrill walked westward through the olive groves. She moved as though she were weary and when they came to a rocky niche carpeted with dry leaves and looking out over the sea, was glad to sit down and be quiet for a little while in the comfort of familiar companionship. "You're tired, old girl?"

"Yes," said Miss Cockrill, unwontedly subdued.

"Fretting about that poor girl a bit, eh?"

"After what we've just seen ..."

"By Jove, yes; and she's sensitive, y'know, soulful, y'know, not like you and me, tough."

Miss Cockrill was on the whole reasonably tough; but she did not care to be reminded of it by her pretendu nor, indeed, to be bracketed in a comparison with him. Besides ... "I don't know what you're talking about, Dick. Who's sensitive? I'm talking about the Grand Duchess."

Major Bull had been talking about Winsome Foley. Miss Cockrill had claimed

him as, over the long years of his fidelity she had established a right to do, and he had perforce gallantly walked off with her; and poor Winne had wandered away, looking soulful, in the opposite direction. He could not help wondering ... Last evening, as they had strolled through the town—by Jove, poor girl, how close she had stuck to him! And there had been a tremble, he swore, in the hand that lay on his coat-sleeve. A little taller than himself, and more bony than in the choosey days, he had cared for 'em: but a fine girl all the same, little income of her own—and half the age of poor Hat. He fell into a reverie. There had been a hen pheasant, long, long ago, when he was a boy, down on his father's little bit of rough shootin' in Suffolk: injured wing, reckernise the bird any day from her irregular flight. Taken a good few pot shots at her; missed her every time. She had survived three seasons, it had become a point of honour to bag her. And so he had at last, and his dear old cocker, Queenie, had retrieved her; and, in triumph, between them they had carried her home. He remembered to this day his pride as, judiciously hung, she had been borne in, done to a turn, with her breadcrumbs and watercress disposed all about her; and, by Jove, poor old girl, how tough she had turned out to be! It made a feller think. Could there be such a thing, after all, as caring too much about the old hen pheasant, while the gay young birds flew by? "Grand Duchess?" he said. "I was talking about poor Winnie."

"Winsome? What's poor about *her*?"

"Thought she looked a bit lonely, wandering off on her own."

"She's with the others, I expect. They were going up to look at the gallows. Goya's supposed to have done the painting on them; quite worn offnow, of course ..."

"Goyer?"

"My dear Dick—you must know that the painter, Goya, is supposed to have spent two years here, after he ran away from Spain?"

"No, I didn't," said the Major rather sulkily. Hat was so damn sharp.

"Well, you'd better then. Call yourself a courier! What about the paintings on the walls of the cathedral? They're obviously Goya: and anyway, where *was* he, between the time he escaped from Madrid in 1765 and turned up in Italy in '67 or '8?"

"Why ask me?" said the Major. "*I don't know.*"

"I know you don't, and I'm telling you. He was here in San Juan. Just the person to get mixed up with pirates. It was probably he who inspired the original Juan to build the cathedral; in those days Goya was doing big murals of religious subjects—it wasn't till he arrived in Rome that ..."

"All right, Hat, all right. I'll mug it all up tomorrow in the guide book. Feller can't be suckin' in culture every hour of the day." 'Nother thing about poor Winnie—she could pour out this kind of drivel by the hour, but she didn't expect a feller to know it for himself. A lot of stuff about painters—very interesting, no doubt, but it wasn't a man's subject. If Hat had a fault, it was that she was a darn sight too critical. Old soldier, grown white in the service of his country and all that—couldn't be expected to shine in academic circles as well. Royal Academy, Sandhurst—not Royal Academy, Burlington House, by Jove! Not unreasonably pleased by his own wit, he repeated this gem to Hat, suitably led up to, i.e. without reference to Winsome. Miss Cockrill paid it the tribute of only a very

wintry smile.

For Miss Cockrill was weary: weary and oppressed. The scene on the gallows rock had revolted her, she saw the world suddenly as ugly and cruel and life as infinitely sad. I am old, she thought; and weary and lonely and happiness has passed me by. A dreary girlhood, an aimless middle-age: and now ... There was still much that she could have found to delight in; and yet here she was chained for the rest of her days to a companion apparently sent by heaven for no purpose but to rob her of all pleasure in these last things. Let her but enjoy a book, and Winsome poked her long nose into it too and said that it was clever, no doubt, but was it all, frankly, quite Worth While? Let them see a mackerel sky, and Winsome gave way to fancies about mummy angels tucking cherubs into pink feather beds, let them engage for a moment in conversation with a wit, a scholar, a sophisticate, a cross old village woman bringing round the milk—and Winsome thought that Underneath they were all just simple, lonely, heart-achey people like Ourselves, crying out to be Loved: let them but pass a damned cyclamen in a pot, thought Cousin Hat to herself, almost in tears, and it reminded Winsome of fairies dancing. Till I die! I have got her with me till I die! Her shaking fingers scrabbled up handfuls of the curling, pointed, sun-dry olive leaves from the ground and screwed them into dust, she shuddered and bit her lip in an effort to preserve her self-control. Beside her, the Major sat chewing on his white moustache, his prominent pale blue eyes gazing placidly out to sea. What bliss, what happiness, to sit for ever with a companion who could look at an expanse of salt water without calling it God's Own, or thinking of it as Our Lady's Sequined Mantle....

"Charming thing poor Winnie said t'other day 'bout the Mediterranean," said the Major dreamily. "Said that from heaven it must look like a bowl of forget-me-nots. Bowl of forget-me-nots!" He mused over it. "Blue, y'know. Yellow bits in the middle—sun dancing on the water. Get it?"

Miss Cockrill could not help laughing and the laughter did her good, it broke up the tension of her little *crise de nerfs* and left her only rather shaken at its intensity. "Oh, Dick," she said, "don't you go whimsical on me too!"

The Major came-to with a start. "What? What?" He turned a little and glanced at her white face. "I say ... Bit grey round the gills. Feeling all right, old girl?"

"Yes, I'm all right. It's only that ... Sometimes, you know, Dick, one gets weary and a bit frightened; a woman all alone in life like me."

"You're not alone, Hat," said the Major; referring to Winsome.

Miss Cockrill, however, took it differently. "I know, Dick. And if things had been different ..." Dear old Dick! He was not the world's brightest intelligence but one had grown used to him over the years; and in her mood of weakness she felt that it would be in itself a paradise, only to have someone to rely upon for the endless little difficulties and decisions, the mountain of trivial burden which now, alone, she carried for two. "But it's no good. I won't wish upon you a *menage à trois*, and Winsome won't ever marry now." She had taken off the straw hat and speared it with a hat-pin to the ground beside her and now she put her grey head against his shoulder. "You've been very faithful, Dick."

"By Jove, old girl, not like you t'give way like this," said the Major, growing very red.

She lifted her head and her hands played again with the dry leaves. "No, it

isn't, is it? But ... Well, there it is. I can't leave Winsome now, she couldn't manage on the money she's got, not in the way we manage by living together; and she couldn't understand anything less, she's a silly woman, really, for all her pretensions; she couldn't cope with economy, not real, hard economy. No. I promised her mother and I must stick to my bargain. But we could have been very happy all these years, you and I."

"By Jove, yes, old girl, of course, of course...."

"Oh, dear, Dick!—to sit down just sometimes to a meal with someone who didn't keep dashing to the window to Share with the Little Feathered Friends of St Francis (who flourished in a country where there isn't a single bird left because they've killed and eaten them all). To be able to go out and just dig in the garden without Trusty-the-Spade, or set about the weeds without Twin brothers Hoe and Spud! Not to mention running over the gravel with Hogarth. ..."

"Hogarth?"

"The Rake's Progress," said Cousin Hat, bleakly.

"Poor-Winnie-sensitive-soul ..."

"She is not a sensitive soul," said Hat. "If she were, she'd know that for years every word she has uttered has scraped on my nerves like a knife skidding over a plate."

Nerves all to bits, poor old girl. "Need a rest, Hat, ought to have a change."

"I *am* having a rest, you fool—and a change. And Winsome is all wide-eyed wonder because she can pick a bunch of grapes off a vine, and drools over a dirty old skeleton in a Streatham-High-Street dress. If only," said Miss Cockrill desperately, "Juanita would give her wretched sign and get herself canonised and Winsome could sell thousands of copies of her translations and be rich and independent—and you and I could be free!"

But perhaps poor Hat herself was not so very sensitive either; or she might have observed that, gallantly though he puffed and protested, such an outcome was no longer quite unreservedly the heart's desire of her faithful Dick.

The group, in the meantime, bereft of their shepherd, had wandered off to inspect the Vaporetto de Muerte: missing him dreadfully, for most of the ladies were setting their (widows') caps at him and Fuddydiddy was incensed at his relaxing attentions which, surely, had been bought and paid for in advance. A hoard of colourful urchins followed like gadflies in their wake, telling lies about the financial positions of their families, small brown hands thrust out. "Where is Bull? He ought to be here to shoo these creatures away."

"Shoo them away yourself," said Gruff; poor Gruff, who, thanks to the tender care of Aunt Grim, would never have a pack of small boys of her own; or even a Fuddydiddy.

But Fuddydiddy had his hands rammed down on the money in his pockets and could not take them out for fear of creating an impression that he might be about to distribute largesse. Fortunately, the lady novelist was ready to distribute instead and did so, right, left and centre, only careful to keep an account for the income tax people at home. "Research," she explained briefly, listening with keen delight to family histories which would have astonished the devoted and deeply indulgent relatives concerned. Even the Back-Homes were mollified at

hearing of the living conditions behind the facade of luxurious fiesta window-dressing; and, would the Juanese but have admitted the original of the Goya-decorated gallows to be in the U.S.A., would have instituted a Help-for-San-Juan Day, without delay.

Mr Cecil was enraptured with the Vaporetto de Muerte. She lay at her moorings, dingily black and silver, tugging gently on a single tether like a large, richly caparisoned regimental goat. Bunches of ostrich plumes were fixed to every available post, between them hung wreaths, hideously ornate, of innumerable tiny coloured beads, strung on wire. The bulkheads were plastered with photographs, in the da-guerrotype manner, of loved ones who by this means had crossed the Styx from Barrequitas to the mainland—varying in age and beauty but unanimous in somewhat startling choice of background, for the single backcloth of the Barrequitas photographer, portrays an aged donkey peering over a bridge at a waterfall far below, apparently with suicidal intent. Beneath his melancholy nose, generations of *bambinos* roll on bamboo table-tops with every evidence of acute strangulated hernia; the brides simper, the old ladies glare from behind their abundant moustaches, the gentlemen strike attitudes of bashful grace: all with eyes glazed from two minutes' unwinking attention to the Juanese birdie. Mr Cecil read out the tributes of the living to those thus petrified into immortality, with hoots of happy laughter; and, forgetful of their own annual contributions to the *In Memorium* columns at home, the widows tittered in sychophantic chorus. He left them and wandered off into the sable-hung bowels of the boat.

Tomaso had brought the *Arcivescovo* back to the vaporetto and, in the absence of captain and crew, a-feast on the island, commandeered the one small saloon, below decks, and there laid the old man on a slatted wooden seat, with a rolled-up cloak beneath his head. Others had come forward with tentative offers of help; but with the Grand Duke in his present mood, both Church and State must be on the hop not to offend, and if Tomaso di Goya and his renegade friends cared to stick out their revolutionary necks and take the responsibility off their hands, so much the better. He sent off a message summoning the Gerente and, dismissing his followers, sat down by the still semi-conscious old man for an hour's constructive thought.

By the time Mr Cecil arrived outside their door, the Archbishop was better and, fortified with *arguadiente*, deep in agitated counsel with his new friends. That his execution would shortly take place appeared to be accepted fact, at least between himself and the Gerente: El Gerente, indeed, being lavish with promises to make the whole business when it came as little personally disagreeable to his Grace as possible. He only wished that he could have put Mario on the job; but Mario alas! was sailing tomorrow with a cargo of contraband including some heroin, and one dared not send anyone less responsible, drugs were always so tricky. Jose, unfortunately was *not* to be relied upon, but Jose it would have to be: the trouble was, he was apt to lose his head and let go at the critical moment and it did rather muck things up. However, said the Gerente cheerfully, at the Archbishop's age and in his state of health, whatever happened he wouldn't last very long; and in hanging, really that was all that counted. Of course, he added, if Juanita would only turn up trumps ...

"Juanita will give no sign," said Tomaso, elaborately impatient. "Count that

out.”

“We must continue to pray,” said the Archbishop.

“Of course. And if she answers, Arcivescovo, well and good. But ...” He looked down at his black-rimmed fingernails, searching for some path of ingress into the old man’s pious and simple mind. “Why should she answer? This is an affair of men. How dare we ask the saints to intervene?”

“It is not for myself, my son. Who am I to demand a miracle from heaven, to save my worthless life? It is for the honour of El Margherita herself. It is a challenge to her.”

“You are too humble, Arcivescovo.”

“No man can be too humble in the face of heaven.”

“Ah, no. And, therefore—may not Juanita feel this too? Is it likely that for her own glorification, she will perform a miracle at the bidding of Juan Lorenzo?”

“If she gives no sign, then we must take it that she is content to wait for recognition.”

“But we can’t wait,” said the Gerente, bursting out with it. “Tomaso and I can’t wait.” Tomaso threw him a warning glance and he amended: “San Juan el Pirata can’t wait.”

“I confess I would like to have known before I died—”

“Exactly, Arcivescovo: *you* can’t wait either. But once Juanita were recognised—ah, then you could go to God with a peaceful mind, knowing your island was safe in her hands, knowing that from all over the world *touristi* would be flocking in—”

“Pilgrims,” said Tomaso, kicking him under the table.

—pilgrims would be flocking in: from Italy and Spain, each having a share in our glory, from America and England and France and Germany, all eager to witness the ceremonies. We could spin the ceremonies out for—oh, as much as a year: start a whole new season, perhaps, in this way, popularise San Juan for the months of the English winter. The trade!” cried El Gerente, carried away, his ankles black and blue from Tomaso’s assaults on them, but oblivious of it all. “The smuggling! Think what the tourist hotels alone must import. And the *funghi*! My wife’s brother, Arcivescovo, who is in the kitchens at the Bellomare, he has made a discovery. By a mistake, some *funghi* were fed to a party of English *touristi*, which had been intended for the hotel *milch* goats. Guiseppe waited quite anxiously, he, alone, knowing what had happened; but instead of their dying off in agony, the *touristi* enquired a day or two later whether they might not again try this interesting dish. Arcivescovo, these toadstools are now gathered by the basketful by my sister’s children, dried in a disused fowl house and sold off in the streets at great price for these fools to take home to America and England in little paper bags. Let the tourist trade prosper and my brother-in-law will be a rich man one day. And then there is the wine. A whole business has grown up of expressing wine from the *Toscanita* grapes; who, if the *touristi* don’t continue to flourish, will consume this horrible stuff? And then, Tomaso, our snuff-boxes....”

“It is very true,” said Tomaso, his eyes darting daggers at his partner, “that material prosperity would follow Juanita’s canonisation. But we do not think of that. It is the spiritual gain, Arcivescovo. Innocenta, for example,” said Tomaso piously, “reckons that with two really bumper years at the Colombaia, she could

afford to reopen the convent.”

“As to that, my son, I have discussed the matter with both the Grand Duke and El Patriarca and both are of opinion that this dream of Innocenta di Perliti should be discouraged.”

“Discourage the *convenuto*!”

“El Beatitud considers that as a *convenuto* the Colombaia would be a loss to San Juan. That sink in the town is fit only for casuals from the mainland, come over on the *vaporetto* for the day trip. If Innocenta retires—where, says El Beatitud, will there be to go? He thinks not so much of the young ones as of the married men, respectable fellows like yourself, Gerente, with your families to think of. And the Grand Duke is anxious about the *touristi*, what will they think if we can offer them but one colombaia?—and that a wretched hole-in-the-wall in Barrequisas.”

“But, Arcivescovo—the *convenuto*! To the glory of El Margherita!”

“Alas, my son, when I am gone, who will fight for the glory of El Margherita?”

“Exactly,” said Tomaso triumphantly. “And, therefore, this must be achieved before you die.”

“I have not long. If Juanita fails to give some sign on San Juan’s Day ...”

El Gerente groaned, burying his face in two large, dirty brown hands.

“If on San Juan’s Day she fails,” said Tomaso, decidedly, “her canonisation will not come in our generation—if ever. When you die, Arcivescovo, there is no one. El Obispo will become Archbishop in your place, and El Obispo is wax in the hands of the Patriarch.”

“The Bishop is a good man, my son, you must have respect for the princes of Mother Church. But if he shows signs of resistance to the Patriarch ...”

“... he will not succeed as Archbishop. So, since El Patriarca is against applying to Rome for the canonisation, so must the Bishop be. And all I say is, Arcivescovo, what you say yourself—all hope is lost of the canonisation if, on the Fiesta di San Juan, Juanita gives no sign. The truth is,” said Tomaso, leaning forward, his thin brown face keen and dominating in the dim light, his thin brown hand clenched on his embroidered knee, “the truth is that on that day El Margherita must—she *must*—give a sign.” He paused. “Or rather ...”

“Or rather?”

“Or rather,” said Tomaso slowly, relaxing back against the wooden chair and letting his hands fall limply at his sides as though the matter were concluded by the speaking of the very words, “or rather, let us put it this way—*El Exaltida must receive a sign.*”

The boat rocked gently, the water softly slapping wet hands against her wooden sides, the dying daylight filtered through the smeared round portholes into the little room. Outside, Mr Cecil leaned against the tarnished rail of the companion-way and listened with all his ears, within the old man sat bolt upright trying to control the senile shaking of his head; and Tomaso and El Gerente put out hands to their arguadiante glasses, drained them and refilled. “Arcivescovo?”

“No, no, my son, thank you.” But he changed his mind, he was desperately weak from the hideous events of the day, a day that had started with the delivery of the Sermone de Defunto and gone on through the muffled horror of hours spent beneath the hood and cloak of the Hanging Men: the dragging of old, bare

feet across the arena and up to the Gallows Rock, buffeted by the movements of the blindfolded dancers, racked by the shovings and jostlings of the populace who, unaware of his identity, urged him on with laughter and mockery to join in the caperings of his fellow condemned. And now it seemed that all was not yet over. He tossed down half a glassful of the raw spirit and it fled through his bloodless veins like a thing on fire. "What do you mean—the Grand Duke must receive a sign?"

"I mean simply that if Juanita will not send a message, we must send a message *for* her."

The Gerente's jaw dropped, he sagged in the folds of the great, blue cape staring in blank incredulity. The colour drained from the old man's face, leaving the white scar gleaming on his forehead, a splash of milk spilt upon mottled marble. "God forgive you, child: this is sacrilege!"

"Sacrilege! Is it not sacrilege, rather, for Juan Lorenzo to demand this miracle? If Juanita, Santa Juanita, will not dance to his tune—he will do thus and thus: so says the Grand Duke. A man, a mere man—he challenges the saints. What sacrilege then? if mere man take up the challenge in defence of the saints. I say it is the Grand Duke's duty," said Tomaso, thumping his brown hand on the cabin table, "to apply for recognition of El Margherita. He evades his duty by issuing to her this impudent ultimatum. It is a trick: to cheat Juanita before all the people, a trick to cheat all the people. The answer is very simple: let the people, in our persons, trick him back."

"But if Juanita ..."

"If Juanita herself gives a sign, then there will be two signs instead of one, that is all: our sign will be a leading-up to hers, a rounding-off of it. There is nothing to be lost by our trying: and so much to be gained which, if we do not gain it now, is lost for ever. The Grand Duke has promised: if he receives a sign, he must apply to Rome. And your other wish, also, Arcivescovo, must surely follow. The Grand Duchess is to pray for an heir; if she receives a sign then surely, surely she must accept from now on, what children the good God sends her. So everyone is made happy. Your life will not end upon the gallows and when it does end, you will die content. Innocenta, will have her Perliti again if Juanita gives her sign, El Gerente will grow rich; and I, no doubt," said Tomaso, looking down his long nose, "shall find my reward, wherever it happens that I may seek it." He gave them no time for further protest or argument. "Arcivescovo—the thurible, the Cellini thurible...."

"The thurible?"

"The thurible is in your keeping. Let me have access to it for an hour or two, let me have it for a morning in my workshop: and on the day of the fiesta, when the Grand Duke has made his appeal to Juanita and steps forward to offer incense as the custom is, then from the thurible shall come, not a cloud of white smoke scented with the scent of incense, but a cloud of rosy pink smoke, scented with the scent of a thousand roses, the national flower of San Juan: the scent of a thousand, thousand roses, mingling with the scent of the roses in the Duomo, that will rise up and up in a great rosy cloud so that all shall know, even the blind shall know, that Juanita has answered. The scent of our island flower shall be Juanita's answer to our island's prayers...." He paused at last. "It is simple and it is dramatic. There can be no flaw in it."

"Simple is not the word for it," said El Gerente. "As for dramatic, the drama will come when El Exaltida discovers that attar of roses instead of incense has been thrown on the coals, with a little red colouring matter for good measure." Not for nothing had El Gerente, two years ago now, spent a week in the invigorating aura of Scotalanda Yarrda as represented by Inspector Cockrill, brother of Cousin Hat.

Tomaso looked at him coldly. "Do you take me for a fool?"

"A fool by no means. Simply a raving lunatic with no concern for your own neck or the Arcivescovo's neck or mine. Rosy smoke, indeed! Who will believe it for a moment? Anyone can throw a little bath salts on the thurible coals."

"You heard me ask for access to the thurible for some hours, in my shop. Do I need several hours, to throw bath salts on the coals? Arcivescovo, Serenity, take no heed of him. Give me this censer tomorrow morning for an hour or two ..."

He threw wide his clever hands, shrugging his shoulders up to the lobes of his ears. "Am I not goldsmith to San Juan?"

"But what can you ...?"

"A sliding door, Serenity: a tiny, sliding door concealing the scented pellet, so arranged that it opens only when the Grand Duke swings the thurible forward, and closes as it swings back. Invisible when the thurible is not actually in use, invisible to anyone examining it, however closely. Let the Grand Duke throw his own incense on the coals, let him arrange and light the coals himself, if he will; let him go over the thurible afterwards with a magnifying glass—still when it is tossed up and forward it will send forth billows of rosy, rose-scented smoke; and still he will never be able to discern that it has been tampered with."

"A miraculous thurible!" The Gerente thought it over, shaking his head in wonder. "Clouds of rosy smoke—our national flower, the flower of San Juan's Day! And ..." He grew eager. "And not once only?—not once, Tomaso, but always, would not this be possible? Imagine it!—Juanita's gift to San Juan, in honour, in celebration of her canonisation—a miraculous thurible which, fed with ordinary incense, sends forth the scent of roses. A new pellet each time—what more simple, Tomaso, eh?"

"My sons ..."

"Crowds flocking to San Juan to see the miracle take place, each time the censer is used. The turisti!—special vaporette from the mainland upon every fiesta day, my cousins between them own both the vaporette ... And momentos—miniature censers, Tomaso; you could design a miniature thurible, one copy and we could have them turned out for the turisti by the hundred ... Tangiers ... El Hamid—we could use him again, more positive specifications this time of course. ..."

"My sons ..."

"Tiny censers for charm-bracelets, that actually worked: my cousin's children could be employed, perhaps, rolling the little pellets..."

"My sons," said the Arcivescovo, for the third time, forcing up his thin old voice to shout El Gerente down. "No more of this! To stage a 'miracle' upon this one occasion to the glory of Juanita—well, perhaps; but to repeat it for mere monetary gain, to profane the piety of our people—it is not to be thought of. Tomaso di Goya ..."

"Do not look at me, Arcivescovo, no such thought ever came to my mind. The

moment our single 'miracle' is over, I will in your presence dismantle the work I have done."

El Gerente bowed his head in shame. "Forgive me, Arcivescovo, I was carried away." He remembered the horror with which, only three days ago, he had received Tomaso's proposals regarding the multiplication of Juanita's crumbs; and crossed himself and muttered a prayer for her intercession on his behalf. But in those three days, he could not help observing, while he might have deteriorated, Tomaso's attitude had undergone a remarkable change for the better. He eyed his friend warily. There was something odd about this plan of his, something vaguely childish: and Tomaso di Goya was not, on the whole, remarkable for childish attributes of mind.

The widows came sniggering down the stair, exclaiming at the piously funereal aspect of the little bar which, consistent with the rest of the décor, was in mourning purple with touches of silver and black, right down to black edges round the labels on the bottles; and even, said Mr Cecil, recovering from his rage at being interrupted in so delicious an eavesdropping, black olives in the dishes on the counter. He treated them to a Juanello apiece, calculating the cost exactly and leaving the money with a little note on the bar counter—to the immeasurable astonishment of the next casual customer, who promptly pocketed it. The widows were flattered: but they were anxious about the dear Major—not seen him for hours, so unlike him to leave them unattended and these Juanese were so untrustworthy, could Anything have Happened, was there Anything they should Do ...? They chittered and chattered like a flock of starlings, sipping daintily at their drinks.

Mr Cecil eyed them uneasily. A bevy of well-to-do relicts—and the Major hard up, solitary, still a little kick left in him, and visibly chafing at the long, fraying tether of his devotion to 'poor Hat' ... Mr Cecil was fond of Cousin Hat. He liked rather waspish middle-aged ladies, being something of a waspish middle-aged lady himself; and he would not see her outpaced by some second-hand article less in need than herself of the Major's comfort and care. "What's this? Gone off on his own?"

Well, not exactly on his own. That Miss Cockrill had been with him. An old friend, it appeared....

Jealousy, jealousy! cried Mr Cecil.

The ladies, tittering, disclaimed: passing the buck to one another, making dabbling little, fishing little jokes, steely-eyed, behind the jokes, to detect the real truth of one another's feelings. 'It's Mrs Trubshaw, she went quite pale when the Major went off, you know you did, Mrs Trubshaw ...!' 'Well, I like that—who went off with him herself, that evening in Rome ...?' 'And what about a certain bunch of flowers in Cortina D'Ampezzo ...?' Mr Cecil drank it all in and did not care for it a bit. Major Bull was hardly acute of observation but even he, surely, must recognise sooner or later if he had not already, that well-padded comfort both of body and bank-balance was, in half a dozen guises, his for the asking. He decided to take a hand. "Well, all I can say, duckies, is do be careful. You wouldn't want to find yourselves numbers six to twelve in Bluebeard's little abattoir, now would you?" But he clapped his hand to his mouth. "Oh, dear!—I shouldn't have said."

The ladies put down their Juanellos one after another, the sound of glass upon

wood made a clop-clop-clop of regimental precision all along the bar counter. "Bluebeard?"

Oh, dear, cried Mr Cecil, again, he never should have mentioned it. They must forget all about it, every word, please, please, just forget ... And anyway, he added, honestly duckies, sheer exaggeration. "Not more than two at the most, of that I'm certain."

Not more than two. But two what?

Well, wives, said Mr Cecil. He was in a terrible taking. "One does wish one had never said, and you must all forget every word of it, promise, *promise!*"

But forget what? said the ladies, ashen faced.

Just forget that one had ever uttered one single, single word. One was madly keen, said Mr Cecil, enjoying himself hugely, on giving people a second chance—well, in this case a third chance, of course—and that their pasts shouldn't follow them round. Not that the Major's pasts could follow him round anyway, because after all they were ... Well, that had, no doubt, been the whole purpose of ... But no, no—one had already said too much. He would only implore them never to ... Well, not to ... Well, just to be a little extra careful if ever there was a *gun* anywhere about. Anything else, poison, ropes, daggers, even high cliffs—all utterly safe, it was just that some people had a Thing about guns.... He named no names, he made no accusations, heaven forbid! He only said, just be tactful, dears, about guns ... So, retreating, advancing a little, retreating again, ducking and side-stepping in a sort of one-man verbal quadrille and enjoying himself immensely, he led them like the Pied Piper, filing white-faced and silent after him, up the companion-way and over the narrow gangplank and so ashore; and left them to vanish into a hole in the mountain-side if they would. But when he crept down again to the door of the saloon, discussion of the miraculous thurible had come to an end.

Now in the arena, flares had been lit, a procession was forming, eight biers carried, each with an effigy marvellously fashioned in paper and wood of a hanged man with grue-somely lolling head. These would be borne round the island and launched at last, lightly bobbing, on the current that would carry them to the cemetery on the Italian shore. The single survivor, also in effigy and more macabre than all the rest, jerked its way in capering triumph behind the line of coffins; and all about them the people danced with flares and banners in the dying daylight, men, women and children in a crescendo of music and laughter and chatter and song, a half-hysterical gaiety not entirely arguamente-induced: for in the midst of life we are in death—and every bier as it passed bore the legend, 'I today: tomorrow—you!'

El Gerente and Tomaso di Goya took no part in the dancing. Deep in talk, barely conscious of their surroundings, they shouldered and shoved their way through the mob, walking without particularly directing their steps, up to the Gallows Rock. "But, Tomaso ..."

"Gerente, ask nothing, know nothing. Forget even, for your own good, that we had this talk just now with the old man. As to rose-scented smoke, this of course is nothing but nonsense. I had to give him some story so that I might have access to the thurible: but what is concealed behind the sliding door, will have nothing to do with roses! As to that, anyway—leave it all to me. Your part is to be ready,

to have your men ready, to take control. He who in that moment is prepared, will be strong; and he who in that moment is strong, Gerente, will have San Juan in his hands. And in all San Juan, only you and I will be prepared."

"But I cannot tell my men——"

Tomaso made fists of his hands and hammered the air. "Fool, idiot! of course you will not 'tell your men!' All that is needed is to have them on the alert. Post them at the doors, have a handful strategically placed. All San Juan will be there: you can say you are afraid of panic when the 'sign' comes from Juanita, of over-excitement, a scramble forward, perhaps, which in the crowded building may lead to danger ..." If the prospect of El Gerente's men with their bare feet and blunderbusses casting oil on the waters of religious raptures run amok, afforded him a gleam of amusement, he gave no sign of it. "The great thing is that your politio must not be relaxed, on their knees, in the body of the church; they must not be part of the crowd, and so caught up in the general confusion. When the moment comes, they must be ready for a swift, decisive arrest at your command."

"Very well, Tomaso."

"This will satisfy the people, will give them a feeling of security; will show them, later on when we may need it, that they can have confidence in you. 'Look how he handled things after the assassination!' And above all, it will deflect attention from *me*. The only question is—who shall we arrest?"

El Gerente shrugged. "That is not of importance."

"Perhaps not; but one must pay attention to detail. And my attitude, after all, will be reflected here. Is this to be one of my followers? Or not? Is my reaction to be one of rage and horror at the assassination by some firebrand unknown to me?—the rising up of a strong man, in his wrath and indignation, to take control ... Or is the slaying to be by one of my own men who, in a moment of over-enthusiastic folly, overcome by the sufferings of the people under the tyrant's yoke, etcetera, etcetera, has done this thing: foolishly thinking to please me?—and I, plunged in grief at having been so foully misunderstood, take my part in the rehabilitation of the island, reluctantly but by way of atonement. I have a young fellow, for example, devoted to the cause and to me, a sort of cousin. You know Francisco di Goya?"

"A nice boy. He would do very well. And being a member of your family, if you were to order his death ..."

"A good point. Who then would suspect *me*? Very well. His mother is a widow, half-sister to my uncle, his father was a kinsman also. We must show her some compassion when we come to power; some financial help, perhaps, for the loss of her son. It will look well." El Gerente nodded agreement most readily but Tomaso was far away, already employing the royal 'we.' "It is settled then. Francisco di Goya. I will let him run certain errands in the next day or two which will give colour to our accusation. The next problem is: immediate despatch at the hands of your furious gendarmerie?—or public execution two or three days later: say today week?"

"That would have the advantage of giving the people something to look forward to."

"Very true. And keep their minds occupied. And to have the murderer disposed of too soon after the event, might be an anticlimax. Very well: public execution

on the Sunday, after Mass. If we had the Grand Duke's funeral first," mused Tomaso, "and Francisco walking after the bier in chains ..."

"Will not the people expect the Grand Duke to lie in state? And be embalmed? All the Grand Dukes are."

Tomaso privately thought it unlikely that enough of this particular Grand Duke would ever be assembled to admit of his lying in any sort of state; that he would prove a fit subject for embalmmment was certainly out of the question. "And then," said El Gerente, "there is the question of succession."

The Grand Duke's Heir Apparent, a nephew, was at this time a minor. Whether Tomaso would assume power in a Regency—until he had time to despatch this young sprig in his turn—or do away with hereditary rule from the first, he had not yet decided. "I will deal with all that, leave these things to me, we will see." They had come to the rock and automatically turned their feet to the curve of rough-hewn steps that led up to it; and so arrived and stood looking down over the heads of the great, weaving, multi-coloured, dancing crowd, shifting and shadowy in the flare of the smokey torches. Beyond, the sea lay like wrinkled black treacle and, a black shadow in a silver patch of moonlight, the Vaporetto de Muerte rocked at her mooring. "Tomaso—the Arcivescovo!"

"What about him?"

"Will he not guess? I mean—the thurible ..."

"What of the thurible? He thinks it will belch forth attar of roses as a sign from Juanita."

"But—afterwards ..."

"Perhaps he will think this also was a sign. After all, it is to his advantage that the Grand Duke dies. His life is saved; and I assure you that we shall lose no time in the advancement of his precious Juanita. And he knows that in our hands San Juan escapes into freedom from tyranny. I have taught him my principles and my beliefs, he knows that with me the rights of the people come first and foremost, he knows that with me the Right of the Individual Man is the be-all and end-all of political aspiration, he knows ..."

"He knows—or he will know—that with you lay the death of the Grand Duke," said El Gerente. "And," he added anxiously, for this was the hub of the matter, "with me. And when he knows this—what I say is: what if he speaks?"

"He will not speak," said Tomaso easily.

"He will not speak, you say. That is easy. But *I* say, Tomaso, again—what if he does?"

"Well, what if he does? Old men are easily silenced," said the apostle of the Rights of Man.

Winsome Foley came up to them, rising up out of the shadows, tall and angular as the gallows posts themselves. Her long, gangling body was tensed, her hands jerked, her grey-green eyes stared out witlessly from her white face. "Oh, Senor Tomaso—thank goodness ...! Oh, Gerente ...!" She was exhausted, on the verge of hysteria. Divorced from her party by the defection of Cousin Hat with the Major, she had wandered for the best part of the evening, alone amidst the crowd, unable to extricate herself, her sense of direction soon lost, frightened and insecure: jostled and buffeted, jarred and jolted, affronted at every turn—swung for a moment by the strong brown hand of a dancer passing in some formal set movement, caught and held in half amorous embrace in a patch of

shadow; released, cushioned again, helpless, against soft bosom or thigh, cannoning off to reel against a pair of lovers locked in each other's arms; stumbling away ... The air was shrill with laughter and screaming, the high-pitched chatter of women, the whoops of the men. Unashamed, uninhibited, the girls pranced and kicked, plump arms boneless as bolsters, rounded above sleek, dark heads; triumphant in virility, the men leapt and twisted or, on their own axis, spun dizzily round and round and round. Breathless, dishevelled, bruised, terrified, she had come at last to the gallow steps, climbed up out of the surge and sway of the dancing; and there, thank God ...! "Oh, *Senor Tomaso*, oh, *Gerente*, thank goodness you're here....!"

And thank goodness *you're* here, thought *Tomaso*: nothing could have fitted better into his plans. "*Senorita!*" He made a slight gesture, surreptitiously, of dismissal, and *El Gerente*, astonished, found himself skulking off like a well-trained dog at his master's sign. "*Senorita!* Permit me to assist you. You are alone?"

"Yes. I have come through ..." She jerked her trembling hand to indicate the crowds milling twenty feet below.

"But, *Senorita*—this is not nice for you. They mean no harm but they are rough, they are excited, they have drunk much *arguadiante*." He put out his hand to her. "Come, you shall rest and then I will take you back to your *grouppa*; come and sit for a little while under the olive trees...."

She went with him, thankfully, exhausted, her nerves all a-quiver, starting like a highstrung horse at every moving shadow; and he held her hand as he might have a child's and led her away from the rock plateau and into the grey-green glooms of the olive groves, empty but for the murmur and movement of lovers, lying among the twisted tree roots in each other's arms. They came to a break in the trees, to a grassy sward that looked out over the moonlit sea, and he planted her down on a little mound and sat quietly at her feet. "Be still, *Senorita*. Be peaceful. All danger is past." After a short time he got up again. "I leave you for only a little while. Sit quietly here. No one will disturb you. I shall come back." He came back and brought with him a bottle of light, red wine, some fresh white rolls and a piece of cheese. "Drink: it will refresh you. And then some bread and some cheese—we will have a little picnic together, and soon you will be strong again and forget this fright."

"You are very, very kind," she said.

So very kind; a rescuer, coming to her aid in the final moment of her desperation, gentle, understanding, considerate and kind. Impossible, then, to rebuff him when at last he brought the conversation round to their famous plan. "Yes, and what did you mean, you naughty man, coming up to me in front of all those people with some nonsense about the thurible?"

"Some nonsense, *Senorita!*—this is in deadly earnest," he said, but still smiling up into her face. "You could not really think that our beautiful plan should end here? No, no, it is magnificent, the *Arcivescovo* is delighted with it."

"The *Arcivescovo!*"

"He alone is in the secret. Of course we had to tell *him*. Who else should let you have the thurible? It is in his care."

She put down the glass of wine on the rough grass beside her, her hand searching blindly about for a space for it. "Let *me* have the thurible? Whatever

are you talking about?"

"Senorita, I must have the thurible in my shop. There are hours of work to be done, a whole night of work; I cannot make a place of concealment for the pellet simply by waving my hand over the censer. And there is not much time, the Fiesta di San Juan is in three days time—the Grand Duke himself has commanded our miracle for that day (a little miracle in itself, Senorita, were you not struck by it?). But it means that I must have the thurible by tomorrow."

"What has that got to do with me?"

"The Archbishop will give you the thurible, you will bring it to my shop."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Winsome. "I shouldn't dream of such a thing." If he and the Archbishop, she said, cared to embroil themselves in so absurd and risky a proceeding, that was up to them: she dismissed it all with her old air of kindly, humorous patronage—two small boys playing cloak-and-dagger games, and foreign small boys at that ... "After all, dear Senor Tomaso, what is it to do with me?"

"Only that it was your plan," said Tomaso.

"Goodness gracious, I never meant it seriously, I disapprove entirely of the whole proceeding."

"Night before last, Senorita—you did not disapprove."

"Well, when I say disapprove—I don't in principle, I agree that it doesn't matter very much how the Pope is persuaded to grant what we all know Juanita deserves. But ... Well, I never for a moment took it seriously, I never thought you'd really go through with it."

There was a tiny pause.

"Yet you brought me the book," said Tomaso. "I think you have forgotten, Senorita—together we altered the book."

A dank hand fastened itself for a moment on her vitals, prodded into her fainting heart a cold finger of fear. Blackmail! He was going to blackmail her through Juanita's book. But his face was smiling and frank, his eyes were clear, the little chill, if chill there had ever really been, had melted out of his voice. "I only mean, Senorita, that if you had meant it only for an evening's amusement, you wouldn't have tampered with the book?"

"I didn't tamper with it," she said sharply. "You did."

"I held the pen. You—as it were—held the book. You and I together, both of us, made up the 'message.'" He shrugged. "It was half-and-half." Though of course, he said carefully, it was true that the Senorita alone had had the book in her care. But he laughed, he was warm and gay again, she must not look so startled, he meant only that he was astonished to find her protesting now, that she had not intended their innocent deception to go on.

"Well, I didn't," said Winsome, "and I really don't want anything more to do with it now."

He was dismayed, heart-broken. All the fun would be gone out of it, if the Senorita withdrew. And since the Archbishop was enthusiastic, surely she need have no qualms?

If the alteration to the book were—discovered, said Winsome, refusing this consolatory side-tracking, there would be trouble, she supposed. But for them both. She repeated: for them *both*?

Trouble! Good heavens! He threw up his hands to the soft night sky.

Tampering with Juanita's writings—an act of sacrilege! Trouble would not be the word for it if the alteration to the book were ever found out. For himself ... He shrugged. His lawyers would argue, no doubt, that there could be no possible proof that the addition had been written in by him—it was not of himself but of the *Senorita* that they must think. For not all the lawyers in San Juan could disguise that she, a foreigner, had had the sacred book in her care and had handed it over for the purpose of desecration.... And the law in San Juan, of course ... At another time he would have been off on the hobby-horse again, and most legitimately so; but now he simply shrugged one of his enormous shrugs and allowed his face to grow preternaturally grave. No relative of Inspector Cockereel of Scotalanda Yarrda could need very much prompting as to the horrors of crime and punishment on the island of San Juan el Pirata.

And really there was no earthly reason why it should be found out: if both of them kept their mouths shut, added Tomaso. Their original idea had been to draw attention to the 'miracle': they were to 'discover' the reference, to condition the island for the sign that was to be sent to them on the Day of Roses. This no longer, however, would be necessary; the Grand Duke had done it all for them by his challenge to Juanita to send them a sign that day. Now nothing need be mentioned of the reference in the Diary—when, in due course, it was recognised, all danger would have passed ...

"I don't quite see why," said Winsome. "If there is danger now—there'd be danger then."

Tomaso permitted himself one small, ironical smile; but the danger, he assured her, growing florid, growing vague, flinging his hands about in dismissal of her anxieties, would be nothing after—after the next two or three days. By that time with her assistance—with her assistance—he would have rigged up the false bottom to the thurible, concealed the pellet, returned the censor to the Duomo: the trick would be played, the sign would be granted—there would be no more to fear.... It would all depend—on her giving him her assistance.

"I see," said Winsome. She asked, dully: "What is it you want me to do?"

And after all, it was really very simple. He wanted her to bring the thurible—the base of it only, that was where the work would be—from the Duomo, where the Archbishop would hand it over to her, to his shop. "No one else but us three must know: to tell a secret to one is to tell it to all. But the Archbishop cannot be seen coming to my shop, I cannot be seen bringing anything from the cathedral, it will be best for me not to go near it; and for him and me for the next three days to keep far apart. If the Grand Duke were ever to discover that the censor had been interfered with ..."

"But you say that the sliding door will be undetectable."

"Certainly it will. But if he enquires and learns even that I have handled the thurible, if he only faintly suspects me—*Senorita* you do not know Juan Lorenzo!—I should die."

"Oh, nonsense; you can't execute a man on a suspicion."

Tomaso who had just arranged ignoble death for a cousin and friend on no suspicion at all, could hardly be expected to subscribe to this. "I tell you, it is certain, from the moment the faintest notion enters his head that I have touched the censor, my days are numbered. But you, *Senorita*—what danger is there to you? Who for a moment will suspect that an English tourist should involve

herself in this?"

"Who indeed?" said poor Winsome, bitterly.

"You will go to the Duomo, an innocent tourist, interested as thousands have been before you in the Cellini masterpiece. An appointment has been made, frankly and freely before all the world, for the thing to be privately shown to you. There is nothing in that, it is not a show-piece always on view, it is a cathedral treasure in the Archbishop's keeping. The Archbishop will show it to you, he will hand you the base of it and put the rest in its case and lock it away. You will carry the base away in a large handbag common to all the tourists; you will call at my shop, preferably with a friend or two, you will place some small order: while you are occupied, I shall remove the base of the censer from your bag. Later you will come again, to collect your order, we will proceed in reverse; on your way home, you will slip into the cathedral to light a candle before Juanita's shrine; the Arcivescovo spends half the day there, at his prayers." And she would be very careful—very careful, insisted Tomaso, not to drop or knock the censer on the way back. The—er—the pellet of scent might roll out of its position: it was of importance, enormous importance, that it should not. And then—her task would be done; from then, her role was finished, there would be nothing for her to do but to stick to her story: she had been, as a tourist, to see the treasure, she had looked, admired, rhapsodised, and come away. "What—ever may happen, *Senorita*, stick to this: and so shall I on your behalf and so will the old man. Whatever may happen." He repeated it once again with a strange intensity. "Whatever may happen, deny all knowledge of the thurible...."

But on the whole, thought Tomaso, it was not likely that the *Senorita* would be eager to broadcast her connection with what was all set to happen, three days from now.

From behind the belt of trees came the sound of music, the sound of voices and laughter, muted to sweetness; ahead lay the starlit mirror of the sea. A fleet of little fishing boats had come out and now crept by twos and twos across the dark water, the lamps at their prows throwing down twin circular patches of light that lay on the dark water like golden sovereigns on a cloth of black velvet. Under the split grey boughs of the olives the lovers lay whispering together unashamed and unshaming; over all lay the silver radiance of the moon. He rose to his feet and held out a hand to her. "Come, *Senorita*, I take you now back to your friends." And as they walked back through the olive groves, he took her arm, leaned forward to peer, with quizzical laughter, into her frightened face. "*Senorita*, you are not smiling, you are not happy: is this not fun, our plan of naughtiness, will not much good come from it, for you, for me, for all of us, all San Juan, all the Christian world ...?" He rallied her, laughing still. "There is no danger. It is an adventure, a frolic, you should be gay. Think how we shall smile behind our hands when the smoke goes up, the rosy smoke rising up from the golden censer, Juanita's sign! And for you—there is no danger; for me—ah! it is for me, if anyone, to pull a long, white, anxious face. But I do not, I am gay. And I have my plans. I have borrowed a speedboat from a friend on the mainland, it is hidden away in the reeds down on the shores of the *Toscanita* plain. I shall fill it with all my treasures from the *Joyeria* (not the snuff-boxes, the Grand Duke and his *politio* will be welcome to those); and if there is danger, I must cut my losses and fly away from San Juan for ever." But he needed help, he said,

pathetically, strolling along beside her, his brown hand at her horny elbow, helping her along. It was tricky work transporting his precious things to the boat, he must not be seen too often going down to Toscanita alone. "Could you not express a wish, Senorita, to see the Toscanita plain? It is beautiful down there: I would offer to escort you, we could stuff our pockets and bags with jewels, we could hide them away in the boat, making big pretence of a picnic, of seeing the sights—it would be *fun!*" She did not answer, only dumbly shook her head, stumbling on across the olive roots, across the rock plateau and down the steps, plunging into the crowds that rolled and danced between herself and her goal. And he smiled and murmured, teasingly, and followed her and at last brought her to where Miss Cockrill stood looking on at the dancing with the rest of the group; and handed her over tenderly to the Major's care. "Sir, Senorita Cockereel, I bring back to you the Senorita: she has been lost in the crowd, they are rough and noisy, some perhaps are drunk ... Poor lady," said Tomaso, all impersonal concern, "I met her by chance and she begged me to conduct her back to you. She is distraught." He bowed and flourished, kissed hands all round, bade them his florid, Juanese good nights. "And, Senorita—you will not forget? You have made an appointment tomorrow at the Duomo with the Arcivescovo. He is expecting you. Alas, after all, I cannot come with you, but I have arranged it. You will not let me down?"

"No," said Winsome. She stood staring stupidly into his face, wearily twitching into place her disordered dress. "Tomorrow at eleven. Yes. I'll be there. I won't let you down."

"What on earth have you been doing, Winsome?" said Cousin Hat. "You look like a demented hare."

CHAPTER TEN

NEITHER Miss Cockrill nor, it must be confessed, the devoted Major, had been

consumed with anxiety for Winsome during her absence. The Major and Cousin Hat had been bidden to spend the evening in exalted company and were wrapt in secret misgivings of their own. For a message had come from the Grand Duke. El Exaltida now learned for the first time, said the grey secretary, appearing suddenly before them, bowing obsequiously, that a sister of his excellent friend Inspector Cockereel was on the island. La Bellissima had requested that Miss Cockereel be invited for coffee and a liqueur after supper, at the pavilion. At the same time, said Tabacqui with more bowing, El Exaltida would be happy to entertain Miss Cockereel's niece ("Cousin," said Miss Cockrill rather crossly: a humping great niece of thirty-eight was more than one cared to submit to—people were always making this mistake) and his friend Mr Cecil, and would be much gratified if Major Bull, representing the English visitors at present on the island, would care to join them.... Any anxiety for Winsome was therefore confined largely to whether or not she would return from wherever she might have got to, in time to avail herself of this invitation. On the whole, Cousin Hat secretly rather hoped she would not. A very little encouragement and Winsome would be rechristening her budgerigars Exaltida and Bellissima; and Cousin Hat remembered the slender creature sitting like a figure from a tapestry on the flower-bright bank of the little stream and knew that she could not bear that that clear-cut moment of romance and pathos should be smudged over with the vapourings of Winsome's sensibility. If only she would not get back in time! But here she was, white-faced, eyes popping, covered in olive leaves, and looking quite mad. "Well, come along, Winsome, you're just in time. We're invited up to the pavilion."

Mr Cecil was in a bit of a taking. "One does wish one had known!" One would not have sported one's Juanese get-up, he said; the lavender flannels, perhaps, and one of the hand-made silk shirts (rumour had it that he ran them up himself, in the evenings, at home), and a madly chaste tie. The Grand Duke never wore Juanese costume unless, as on this fiesta occasion, he had to: and what would he think of Mr Cecil's having done it from choice? Major Bull looked down complacently at his own stubby legs, twin pillars of sartorial sobriety in their stout grey flannels; and at the well-controlled curve of brass-buttoned blue blazer above. Miss Cockrill pushed stray hairs up under the squashed straw hat and gave a twitch or two to the cardboard linen dress. "Do tidy yourself, Winsome,

what on earth have you been doing? You look as though someone had been tumbling you under the olives."

If only you knew, thought Winsome drearily; but, brushing aimlessly at the folk-weave skirt where still a few dry olive-leaves clung, she slightly amended the note within her own mind. If only you knew! Poor, plain, despised, whimsical Winsome, in league with a gay young man in a piece of nefarious nonsense that yet was fraught with the perils of—of blackmail.... If only Cousin Hat knew! Gone, at least, would be the superior smile. I wonder, thought Winsome, what you would say if you knew.....

But Miss Cockrill at present had other things on her mind. "Haven't you got rather more to be anxious about?" she said to Mr Cecil, walking with him along the narrow path cleft for them through the excited crowds, by the palace guards. "Than about your clothes, I mean. What about—when you called out this afternoon?"

Mr Cecil turned pale. "You *don't* think my voice would have been recognisable?"

Miss Cockrill privately thought Mr Cecil's voice would be recognisable piping up from the yawning graves on the Judgement Day. She said, however, only that there could not be many people on the island who would have remarked that the goings-on were not quite up to Wykehamist standards. "Though I respect you for it: you probably saved that old man's life."

"But if the Grand Duke had been ... I mean ... He'd just have sent for me alone. He wouldn't have asked you too."

"Perhaps he's lumping us all together; plus the Major 'representing the British on the island'—and he's going to chop off all our heads, for your interference." But that reminded her of La Bellissima and of a danger not remote and not funny at all. And there was still the matter of the old Archbishop. Something must be done. And in this evening's visit lay, almost certainly, their only chance of intercession. "Seriously—why do you think we've been asked? Why's Dick Bull been asked?"

Mr Cecil wriggled after her through the narrow lane of people, his pale face alternately lit to yellow brightness and plunged into deep shadow as the torches dimmed and flared. "You don't really think it's anything to do with oneself?"

"No, no, nonsense; he's probably secretly thankful to you for stopping him."

"It could be. I've observed that there's a very thin line between Juan the Pirate and Juan the Old Wykehamist. I think we might suitably offer a tiny prayer," said Mr Cecil, "that Winchester will be in the ascendant tonight."

The pavilion was delicious, a miniature palatio, its central dome glimmering in the moonlight delicate as an inverted snowdrop above its cloistered patio and cool white colonnades. It was all white: white and silver. White lilies scented the patio, a white peacock strutted the marble-flagged floor, white rugs with a silver sheen of silk were scattered beneath white-painted tables and chairs; a fountain splashed silver over white marble dolphins that tumbled with white marble babies in its silver bowl. Only the eyes of Cristallo, the cat, were brilliantly blue, staring unblinkingly at the white peacock, from where it lay, still as a carved thing, paws turned inward, in its collar of pearls.

El Exaltida was sitting there with the Patriarch and La Bellissima; he a black blot in the embroidered jacket and knee-breeches with the great cloak flung

across his breast like a brigand of old, she cool and slender in her narrow green silk, the embroidered lace veil hung over her shining head; the Patriarch in skull cap and cassock of creamy white serge. In such surroundings, Mr Cecil's extravaganza came into its own, it was the blazer and flannels, the linen and crushed straw that looked odd and out of place. They made their obeisances and sat down awkwardly, Cousin Hat and the Grand Duke by chance a little apart. A young woman handed round black coffee and a tray of little cakes. The Grand Duke poured liqueurs, the tiny glasses lost in his great, ringed hands. "Try a little cheesecake, Miss Cockrill, Miss Foley. They are very good." He put out a hand and caught the girl by a fold of her skirt and held her for a moment, a prisoner. "She tells me she makes them herself." He said in English: "A charming creature? Like a young fawn? She is my wife's new maid-of-honour."

Major Bull looked at the young fawn and hastily averted his eyes. Last night, it had fallen to the Major, as a conscientious courier, to continue with the gentlemen of his party their tour of the island, when the weaker vessels, exhausted by the day's sight-seeing, had retired to bed; and, inflamed perhaps by the pressure of Winsome's hand on his sleeve as he squirmed her round the narrow streets, he had taken the bold resolution to avail himself of the comforts offered by their ultimate—indeed, as soon as the ladies had left them, their immediate—port of call. The comforts had turned out to be, alas! all of his own offering: a shoulder to weep on, a handkerchief (non-returnable) to sniffle into, a heart to confide in: jealous stepmother, by Jove, poor-girl-driven-out-of-home, boy-friend-refusing-marriage-till-dowry-forthcoming, eckcekra, eckcekra ... Plus a little something extra towards the dowry, and an undertaking not to tell La Patrona. But there had been a charming little feast afterwards, in the general patio, all traces of tears now dried away: the wine of the country, pressed (apparently about two days earlier) from the grapes of the Toscanita plain, the inevitable chestnuts in honey, the dried figs, almond-stuffed, the brandied sultanias in lemon leaves: the little cheesecakes ... And now ... The Major's healthy pink face turned two shades duskier, leaving the moustache marooned like a white ship afloat on a round red pond; his prominent pale blue eyes swivelled glassily, he clasped his hands together till the knuckles cracked. Loreнна, reverencing before him with her dish of cheesecakes, took time off for a moment from her bewildering new duties to wonder if the poor gentleman were about to throw a cataleptico. She seemed dimly to recognise his face, but—one saw so many. A client, perhaps?

Miss Cockrill, also, was exceedingly startled. A new lady-in-waiting—introduced, apparently, in the course of this very afternoon, to La Bellissima's court! Watching covertly, she saw the great eyes, shadowed by the lace veil, turned to the girl and back to hers with an urgent appeal. She took a decision. She looked Loreнна up and down with a cool appraisal. "Yes, indeed: quite a pretty gel." She eyed the Grand Duke limpidly. "By no means a *Plain Jane*. And looks—how shall I put it?—*as though she could keep her head*."

You could see the quick flicker of appreciation, of calculation; an almost instant recognition of the truth. He knew that she knew. He gave her a small, ironical bow. "An admirable quality."

"And rare among pretty young women...."

"Who won't do as they're told," he amended.

So it was open warfare. "This particular pretty girl," said Cousin Hat, eyeing the new handmaid reflectively, "would she do as she was told—more than any other?"

"More than any other—who can say? But—I think, perhaps, yes. She at least would not suffer, you see," said the Grand Duke, sweetly, "from conflicting counsel. Her mother is dead."

"A young girl, of course, will look to her mother for guidance...."

"And not only to her mother, it seems?" said the Grand Duke: not so sweetly.

"My own advice in such cases," said Cousin Hat, hastily, "would be that a girl should certainly obey her husband in all respects."

He bowed again. "I am very happy to hear it. Let us hope it meets with a better response than is usually the fate of advice."

"Time will show," said Miss Cockrill. She repeated it significantly. "Time will show."

He took up a cheesecake and sat looking down at it, balanced like an outsize crumb in the huge palm of his hand. "You think so, do you? Just a question of time?"

"And of everyone playing his part," said Miss Cockrill. She went a little red. "Well, I didn't mean exactly ..." In her confusion, she too picked up a cheesecake; but, recollecting herself, put it back on her plate and pushed it ostentatiously to one side. "If you will forgive me, Exaltida—I don't think I care very much for these."

"Don't you really? You surprise me," said the Grand Duke. He threw back his head, opened his mouth and tossed in the little cake; and, catching the passing Lorena by her skirt again, drew her to him. "Bring me more of your delectables, Senorita Seymour," he said.

El Patriarca, meanwhile, was making civil conversation with Winsome Foley, Mr Cecil and the Major. His Beatitude spoke little English but was able to hope that their visitors had had a sympathetic day? The ceremonies were most anti-quatable, most venerably: no doubt they had found it all extremely buffant?

Quite, quite madly buffant, said Mr Cecil.

"There are in Los Caprichos of Goya—but more late—many ..." He gave up the attempt. "Pardon me, if I speak in Juanese. There are, I was saying, in the later works of Goya many references to the Domenica di Boia, the Hangman's Sunday. The 'Caza de Dientes,' for example—the woman pulling teeth from a hanging man. This was a common practice here on the island in the old days: it was the fashion then to have the front teeth studded with small jewels...."

Mr Cecil indulged in a momentary vision of glittering smiles in Mayfair; but dismissed it immediately. The very essence of la mode was, and must be, from the couturier's point of view at any rate, mutability: and diamond-set front teeth would be far too permanent. Unless, of course ... But then, *falsies*! Would it be worth it? Besides, who was he to put money into the mouths of jewellers and dentists—by putting it, he thought wittily, into those of his clients? No, no: a tiny pearl, perhaps, in one's own eye-tooth might be a publicity talking-point, but even that did rather *tie* one. "I don't see quite how they winkled the jewels out?"

Well, but they didn't, said the Patriarch, surprised. Just took the whole tooth out. "There was a great run on tweezers on those days and a regular scramble for

the gallows, one reads; some of the victims not even dead yet and they used to put up quite a fight." He laughed heartily at these pleasing reminiscences.

"One does long to know if the 'Caza de Dientes' has found its way yet to the Forest Lawns Cemetery," said Mr Cecil.

Winsome and Major Bull sat together, a little neglected, their cheesecakes, for one reason or another, untouched; the Major sinking a good many reviving brandies and shying like a startled horse every time Loreнна approached with her inviting smile. "My dear Major Dick," said Winsome at last, for such was her whimsical name for him, "is something the matter?"

"Matter? Good God, no. Just going to ask you the same thing, s'matter of fact."

But there was nothing the matter with Winsome, either. "A little tired, that's all. That horrible crowd ..."

Shocking business, shocking business. The Major shook his white head and chattered like a budgerigar into his chins. "Helpless woman, sh'never have been out alone. Anything might have happened. Well, I mean—well, anything ...!" He dug her in the ribs with an elbow like a navy-blue pork chop. "Damn it all, good-looking girl, y'know, Winnie, couldn't blame the fellers...."

"Whatever do you mean, Major Dick?" said Winsome faintly.

Major Bull chattered and chumphed. Old buffer—past prime—still got eyes in his head all the same, eh, what? "Looking very charming tonight, old girl, by Jove," said the Major with an air of admission not wholly flattering, but gazing most tenderly into her startled eyes.

"My dear Major!" Winsome, who had in her time played many a rubber of Heronsford bridge in the Major's company and watched the tide going out in hospitable bottles, glanced meaningfully at the brandy decanter. "Hush, please! People will hear you."

Feelings-honest-gentleman-not-ashamed ...

"Well, never mind that now, Major, please don't embarrass me," said poor Winsome, fiercely whispering. "You will feel differently in the morning." Over his protests and the opening of a recital apparently relating to a hen pheasant, which she could not begin to understand, she raised her voice and cried out with shrill determination that it was true, was it not, that the 'Colossus' of Goya had been in fact a portrait of old Juan himself....?

"Quite true, quite true," said the Patriarch, a little surprised since he and Mr Cecil were by now adventuring along other paths of converse. "We have at the Palatio a sketch made thirty, forty years before the picture was painted—the same figure, but clothed in the costume that in the last days of his life, when Goya knew him, El Pirata would be wearing. And the monster devouring his children!—that too is recognisably ..."

There was an interruption. Two new figures made their appearance, a wrinkled crone wrapped in black shawls and carried in a sort of litter by two attendants, one scrawny hand clinging to the hand of a stout youth of prep. school age, who walked at her side: La Contessa di Perli, 'La Madre,' surviving parent of El Margherita, a venerable figure now nearing her ninetieth year, and Don Juan Isidro, a nephew of the Grand Duke, known officially as El Bienquisto, the Well-Belovéd. The chair was set down. At a signal from the attendants, Loreнна handed round her tray. The Grand Duke, introductions over, said sharply, "No sweets for you, Isidro."

The Well-Belovéd emptied half a dish of candied chestnuts into his mouth and, losing a good deal of them when he opened it again to speak, was understood to ask why not.

“Because if you continue as you are now doing, and as your great grandmother encourages you to do, you will be named when you get to your English school, not El Bienquisto, but El Porco.”

“If anyone in England calls me names,” said Isidro, transferring a wedge of mashed chestnut to his left cheek, “I will have him beaten.”

“In England you don’t have people beaten. You have to fight for yourself.”

“Then I shall fight.”

“If you took on so much as a blancmange,” said the Grand Duke, without love, “you would be vanquished.” The old woman began to jabber and he gestured towards her with his ringed hand. “Ask her what she wants.”

It was almost gruesome to see the devotion between these two: the old woman, thin, gnarled, brown and brittle as a bundle of dry sticks, the child as white and fleshy and fattily glistening as a lardy-cake. He stilled her chattering with a tenderly imperious hand across her mottled mouth, spoke to her soundlessly, forming his soft, thick lips into slow words. She answered, gibbering back, glib and shrill as a monkey. “La Madre says she does not wish me to ride. She says I shall fall off and be injured.”

“As to that,” said the Grand Duke, “I am glad it has arisen. I have asked these ladies and gentlemen here this evening to advise me on this very matter: as well as for the pleasure of their company.” He bowed to them slightly from his chair and asked suddenly, sharply: “Miss Cockrill—you, for example: have you got a bicycle?”

“A bicycle?” said Cousin Hat. “Yes, certainly.” A good, strong, lady-like, old-fashioned bike with a criss-crossed coloured string protection over the rear wheel to protect the sensible skirts—how else did the man suppose a lady of moderate means got about Heronsford to do her shopping? Winsome had her little car, to be sure, and tootled around most gamely, always in the dead centre of the road and never losing more than half a minute or so, after the traffic lights turned green; fancifully apostrophising other cars and their drivers as (*most* unreasonably hooting) they approached or overtook her: ‘Here comes the Vicar in old Slow-and-Bideawhile ... That was Mrs Brown’s Bentley; The Smoothing Iron, I shall christen it, goodness knows she’s always Dashing Away with it ...!’ Her own car was called The Matchbox. Cousin Hat’s preference for referring to it as that wretched little hearse of yours, she had countered by having it repainted, with another of her quaint fancies, in matchbox colours, dark-bodied with yellow roof and wings. “All it looks like now is something crawling out of a hive,” said Cousin Hat, cheated; but from then on Winsome called it Busy Bee instead, and she wished she had kept her mouth shut; the truth was that with Winsome you couldn’t win. But anyway, yes, she rode a bicycle: and if that were the question, yes, again—she thought a boy should be able to.

“You see, Isidro. In England, everyone has one. Miss Foley—yes? And Major Bull?”

Miss Foley had had a bicycle when she was a girl and it had been called Magicar, short for Magic Carpet, and had carried her away, away, into a fairyland all of her own among the woodland dells, the primrose copses of her

country home. And as for the Major, yes, by Jove, fairyland, fairyland, ting-a-ling-a-ling on the bell, look-no-hands, what, what? "You understand," said the Grand Duke, skating over these contributions a mite hastily, "that in the ordinary way we have no such things on San Juan. No wheels mechanically propelled, are permitted—we are too hilly and far too small. But——" He appealed to them. "The boy is fatherless, it is all left to me. Can I let him go to a prep. school in England, never having so much as seen a bicycle?"

It seemed to Miss Cockrill that so lacking was Don Isidro in attributes desirable in the English prep. school boy, that the mere absence of bicycling experience would hardly be observable: and anyway would be offset by items of knowledge beyond the dreams of most of his fellow pupils. She refrained from comment, therefore, and merely asked whether the Grand Duke had actually obtained a bicycle for him?

"Smuggled up to the palace, yes. A group of my wife's friends arrived from Paris yesterday, this was sent over with their advance luggage, in a wooden case. There are people still on the island, you see, who'd regard it as a contraption of the devil."

Mr Cecil heartily agreed with them. He had got through life with perfect satisfaction to himself without ever having so much as set bottom to saddle, and was about to unburden himself to this effect, when the old woman interrupted with a stream of rapid jabber. "She says," reported Isidro, "that I shall fall off."

"There will be half a dozen palace guards there to hold you on."

"She says I shall evade the guards and try by myself."

"Nothing is less likely; but tell her you shall be watched to see you do not."

"She says I shall do it nevertheless. She says I shall creep out at dead of night and go spinning at a great rate down the steep paths of the gardens. She says," said Isidro shaking his head at the hopelessness of trying to deal with his own insensate daring, "that I am so brave."

"I have already removed the lamp from the bicycle, so that you can't." There was a moment of silence, and the Grand Duke asked in some triumph: "What does she say to that?"

"She says you are taking a suspiciously kindly interest in my welfare," said El Bienquisto: and stuffed another handful of chestnuts into his mouth.

It was twelve o'clock. In the silver moonlight, the silver fountain tinkled in its silver bowl, the marble babies wore masks of shadow that transformed them from innocent childhood to a sort of arrested old age, sporting with the marble dolphins in some horrid ring of vice. Lorennia moved silently, on her rounds of solicitation, pressing forward the tray of sweetmeats, the bottles of green and red and yellow liqueurs. From below in the rock arena came music: singing and laughter and the shuffle and scrape of a thousand dancing feet; here in the patio, only the splash of the fountain made any sound. Even the old crone was silent, staring malevolently out from her nest of black shawls; the boy stood beside her, his fat hand lovingly holding her skinny fingers, his jaws moving mechanically in his bulging face. The Grand Duke leaned back against his marble seat, his arms, black cloaked, spread like a raven's wings along the full length of it, his splendid head bent, staring down at the shimmering rugs beneath his feet. He said at last, and his voice was huge, and deep and soft as velvet, with a sudden note in it like

velvet torn across: "That will do. Tell La Madre that my kindly interest in *her* welfare prompts me to suggest that she should retire at once. My barge will take her back to Barrequitas now, and return for us later. You will go with her. Say good night to my guests."

The boy made a round of hand-kissings obediently, his chubby buttocks quivering with the shock of each smart bringing-together of his chubby heels. To La Bellissima he murmured a few words and she held his hand for a moment and smiled at him kindly and answered him, in French. The old woman poked out two fingers from her shawls and comprehended them all in a gesture of dignified, if not very gracious, farewell. The boy caught up a last handful of sweets and stuffed them into his mouth, the attendants lifted the palanquin, the cortège departed. "My dear, stap one's vitals," said Mr Cecil, "what a gruesome pair!"

"Few of my relatives are precious to me," agreed the Grand Duke. "But La Madre and El Bienquisto, I confess, jostle for position at the bottom of my list."

"How would one *cook* him?" said Mr Cecil, fascinated. "One can't think of anything else. He'd look so splendid on a menu—Blanquette de Bienquisto ..."

"Stuffato d'Isidro," suggested the Grand Duke.

"Grand Ragout de Garçon Juanese ..."

"Bambino bollito ..."

"Or, Boiled Boy in White Sauce...."

"And now, Winsome," said Cousin Hat, "you have seen the mother of your idol. How did you like her?"

The narrow hands fiddled with a folk-weave pleat, the gooseberry eyes filled with tears. It had been—disillusioning: a terrible old woman and after this long and bewildering day, almost more than one could bear. "She's old," she said at last, bleakly. "And after all—Juanita may have taken after her father....?"

"Well, no," said the Grand Duke. "I must admit that she favoured her mother's side—if favour is the word for it; for, with all deference to her sainted character, my dear aunt Juanita was by no means a charmer."

"La Madre would be—your great aunt?"

"My great aunt, yes. And great, great grandmother to the boy. She married a brother of the then Grand Duke, my grandfather, a monstrous old party known to his very face as Pedro the Vile. The Grand Duke, I mean: her husband had no time to be vile, he was polished off much too soon."

"Polished *off*?"

The Grand Duke shrugged. "One can only suppose so. My family have splendid health—why should he die young? He'd offended by marrying La Madre, as she's called now, a woman of no breeding from the Toscanita plain. The family has died out—assisted also by Duke Pedro, I take it; he would have no love for his brother's vulgar in-laws and they certainly came by a chapter of most curious accidents." He shrugged again. "I confess that I long to apply the same routine to their one survivor. But the people would object—she has a veneration value for El Margherita's sake: La Madre, The Mother of Juanita. We produce her at these fiestas. They would miss her."

For Winsome too, despite all, she had a veneration value. "La Madre! To think one has actually talked with the mother of a saint!"

"Except that you didn't exchange a word between you," said Cousin Hat.

"It's true that one couldn't quite understand ..."

"No one understands her nowadays," said the Grand Duke. "Except the boy. For my part it's years since I even made the attempt. I try never to speak to her."

"Yet she lives in your palace?"

"She has apartments there: she's had them for over seventy years. Old Pedro took a fancy to the infant Juanita: otherwise, no doubt, mother and daughter would have followed Papa. However, the palace is large, thank God, and I never need see her: just on high days and holidays. For the rest, she keeps to her quarters and sits spinning mischief and spoiling what's left to spoil in her great-great-grandson."

"Her mental faculties ...?"

"Are unimpaired as you see," said the Grand Duke, dryly. He laughed. "It by no means escapes La Madre, in fact, that for two pins I would seat the Well-Belovéd on his bicycle and send it spinning down the hill to Barrequetas; not pausing at the quay. But alas!—like La Madre herself, El Bienquisto would be missed." He added, not looking at anyone: "He is my heir."

There was a rather chill silence. El Patriarca, not very well understanding what was going forward, nevertheless recognised a note in his master's voice, and launched once more into social chit-chat regarding the delights of the Domenica di Boia. The discomfort of El Pato, no doubt, they had found extraordinarily buffant?

"El Pato?"

"The Arcivescovo, you know. We call him El Pato, or sometimes El Anitra—the duck."

Well, actually, said Mr Cecil, they had not found that frightfully buffant; no. "Would you say just a trifle decrepit for practical jokes? And ill?"

"Ah, ill, yes." El Patriarca touched his own forehead. "He will die very soon." For some reason this appeared to add richly to the entertainment.

"You do not understand my country," said the Grand Duke heavily, from his seat. The cat had sprung on to his knee and he sat caressing it idly, the jewels winking as he ran his ringed fingers through its short white fur. "These people are very childlike. Many of them do not read or write: you may teach them but they will forget, you may speak but they will not listen: they do not want to know. We must reach them, therefore, by signs; and even the signs must be strong and clear and in their own language, such as children understand."

"But need they be cruel?" said Miss Cockrill.

"Cruelty is a language that everyone understands."

"And so, to teach them, an old man must be tortured?" She leaned forward, boldly, looking him in the face. "To teach them what? Why was it necessary?"

His hand tightened on the loose fur behind the cat's head, pulling it back till the blue eyes were Siamese slits, the thin lips a grin over the pointed teeth. He let the skin go and the cat purred contentedly on. "You heard what the Archbishop said in his sermon today?"

"Everyone heard that." She answered a little at random, her eye was seeking Mr Cecil's eye: she was, it appeared, for some undisclosed reason, anxious to be left alone with this terrible man. And welcome, thought Mr Cecil, unable however at the moment to do anything about it. "Do you suggest that I should

remain silent," the Grand Duke was suggesting smoothly, "while the Grand Duchess of San Juan el Pirata is rebuked before her people?"

"I see." Miss Cockrill looked 'Jane Seymour' up and down, just once, and returned her eyes to his. "So all your anger was on account of your wife?"

"I, also, was rebuked—in the matter of Juanita."

"Everyone wants her canonised. Why not agree?"

Slit eyes and the grin again. He said coolly, however: "I have agreed. If on the Fiesta di San Juan she gives us a sign ..."

"That's just an excuse. You know she won't give any sign."

Really, thought Mr Cecil, the sooner one obeyed Miss Cockrill's injunctions and left that intrepid woman alone with her prey, the more confident one would feel of surviving till morning. He developed an imperative longing to see over the Pavilion. If La Bellissima would be so prodigiously kind ...? And the Patriarch, no doubt, could explain many details to them both....? But the Grand Duchess shrank into the shadows of her veil, the Patriarch hissed and frowned. It was not permissible to withdraw without express command. That he too would have been thankful to absent himself from this explosive atmosphere was apparent from the anxious eye he bent upon his lord, and the burst of chatter which ostensibly covered his horrified interest in what, in only vaguely understood English, appeared to be going on. Mr Cecil sighed, and resigned himself to calamity. The Grand Duke said coldly to Cousin Hat: "Very well, then. Juanita is unable to give a sign. In that case she is not a fit subject for canonisation."

"Why should she give a sign just because you ask her?"

"The whole island asks her. For one reason or another, the whole island desires her canonisation."

For one reason or another. A sign from Juanita, Juanita welcomed at last by Mother Church into her Communion of Saints and, 'for one reason or another,' what joy in San Juan! A people, now poor and happy, made rich and happy. Tomaso di Goya no longer need fight and scheme for rights no one cared two pins for, but, rich and happy too, might marry his gentle Lorenna and know again the pure joy of his glorious craft. El Gerente could retire from the intricacies of smuggling combined with police work to prevent the said smuggling, and spend his life in the sun with his lovely daughters; his relatives might cultivate their funghi and press their wine, confident in an enthusiastic market.... Innocenta would walk again in her convenuto, the Arcivescovo go serenely forward, his life's work done, to the release of death. And, thought Cousin Hat, ignorant of all these private longings, how happy might Juanita make even her casual visitors! The Back-Homes could levy claim without delay upon table and crumbs, Fuddyduddy would have had it all 'thrown in'; and Winsome might enter her convenuto or, made rich with the profits of her sole rights in El Margherita's diaries, launch out on a life of her own: clad from head to foot in folk-weave and opals, with jabots of real Valenciennes, a chauffeur for Busy Bee and a gardener to wield Brothers Spud and Hoe and Hogarth and Trusty-the-Spade. And she ... Dick was an old fool, but he was devoted and kind; if he were growing into old-buffer habits it was only from being too much alone and he could soon be cured. A man: a man with a man's strong hand at the helm, with a man's broad shoulders to carry the burdens, a man's big, faithful heart. How strange, she had said to Dick, if a crack-pot hysteric on a tea-table should

bring about at last her release, and his reward. And now this obstinate Duke ... She said to him, fretfully: "But why insist on this sign?"

He sprawled against the back of the marble seat, one arm spread along it, the other hand continuing mechanically to ruffle the cat. "Shall we say—that it will make up our minds for us?"

"Your minds are already made up. The people for. You against."

"Very well, then, it can make no difference."

"It does make a difference. It shifts the responsibility away from you and on to the people."

"God forbid," he said, almost laughing, "that my people should have responsibility in any matter."

"And that's just the point—they won't really have, of course. It's you that—already—have made the decision. But I don't see *why*."

"You and many others."

"And then this terrible business about the Archbishop." She took a deep breath: it was for this, to speak this sentence, that she had come here. "You can't really have him—killed?"

"Executed," said the Grand Duke. He elaborated: "And only if Juanita gives no sign to save him."

"You know quite well Juanita will give no sign. Very well, then," she said flatly. "I call that murder."

There was a cold little pause. He said at last, quietly: "I have permitted liberties I otherwise would not permit—to the sister of my friend Inspector Cockrill."

"Your friend Inspector Cockrill," said Cousin Hat, "would call it murder too."

"A judicial execution—for the crime of High Treason."

"Is it treason to hope ones country may have an heir?"

"In such terms, yes." He leapt up so suddenly that the white cat, startled, shot off his knee and hid, trembling, under the bench; and stood towering above her, the cloak, like a black thundercloud flung over breast and shoulder, half concealing his face so that only his eyes stared down at her, dark with the cold, black, uninhibited rage of his violent ancestry. "The Hereditary Grand Dukes of San Juan el Pirata, Senorita, do not take kindly to public rebukes—nor to private ones either." The little duchess also had risen and stood, frightened, gazing up at him with that quality of stillness which in his presence she wore about her like a colourless veil; and he threw out his hand towards her and roared, breaking into his own tongue in the extremity of his fury: "Look at her! What do you think *she* felt, stripped to the public gaze like a harlot, by that jabbering old fool? The Grand Duchess of San Juan el Pirata—La Bellissima, Felissima, Delicia, Rosa del Isla, Gran Ducesa di San Juan el Pirata—what do you think *she* felt?"

"Felt?" said Cousin Hat. "She didn't feel a thing. She couldn't understand a word the Archbishop was saying."

He stared at her for one brief moment that seemed an eternity of terror: and burst into peal upon peal of laughter, as though he would never stop.

There was a diversion. The Little French Friends had been down in the arena mingling with the crowds, under the protection of half a dozen of the Juanese young gentlemen of the Grand Duke's court, and now returned, chattering and

laughing, having evidently got on extremely intimately with the six young men, though neither could speak one word of the other's language. The Grand Duke stopped laughing at last. "Patriarca!"

"Exaltida?"

"Be good enough to remain here and help La Bellissima to entertain my guests. I am going to show Senorita Cockrill over the pavilion. Senorita Loreenna!"

"Exaltida?" said Loreenna, reverencing.

"Do you like cats, Loreenna?"

"Well—yes, Exaltida," said Loreenna, doubtfully. Everyone in San Juan likes cats.

"Then rescue Cristallo from beneath the bench and comfort him with some of your cheesecakes. Make my apologies for having alarmed him. Wait upon my guests till I return." He offered his arm to Miss Cockrill and, casting only one rather desperate glance at Mr Cecil as she passed him, she swept gloriously by. "How do you like our colonnades, Miss Cockrill: each column, you see, is an imitation curtain swept back by a couple of cherubs—don't you find them amusing....?" But at the end of the terrace he handed her to a seat and stood, leaning back against a pillar, two marble cherubim posed above his head. "I owe you a debt of gratitude, Senorita. It never occurred to me—but what you say is true."

"La Bellissima was quite ignorant that anything strange had happened. I discovered that this afternoon."

"I was angry. I gave myself no time to think that of course she doesn't speak Juanese. She must have been somewhat bewildered," he said thoughtfully, "at my subsequent lecture."

"But now, anyway," said Miss Cockrill, happily, "all that will be over."

He bowed. "The Grand Duchess shall have another chance."

"And 'Jane Seymour' will be dismissed?"

"Oh, as to Jane Seymour, no. Jane Seymour speaks very eloquently by her mere presence here. I think she must stay."

"But, if the Grand Duchess—?"

"Ah, but if the Grand Duchess does *not*?"

"The Grand Duchess cannot command nature," said Miss Cockrill.

"But I, on the other hand, can command Jane Seymour."

"I see," said Miss Cockrill. She was silent for a moment. She said slowly: "And the Arcivescovo?"

"His offence is after all no less because it did not succeed in distressing La Bellissima."

"So if Juanita gives no sign—and of course she will not—the old man dies?" She paused. She said: "And a little later, perhaps—La Bellissima too?"

The Grand Duke leaned back against his marble pillar, his arms folded under the cloud of black cloak. "La Bellissima?"

"The old man prays for a sign. None comes—and so he dies. La Bellissima is to pray for a son: so, also, if none comes ...". Her hands began to shake a little but she said steadily: "If the Grand Duchess gives you no heir, you must marry again. But you can't do that while the Grand Duchess lives. So ... And once again Juanita must take the blame."

A silence. "You are a brave woman, Miss Cockrill," said the Grand Duke.

"No, I'm not. I'm just not afraid of *you*," said Cousin Hat, thrusting her hands between her knees to disguise their uncontrollable trembling.

"Very well then. Continue. If you dare."

"Oh, I dare," said Miss Cockrill jauntily. She continued accordingly. "I've only just understood it; but I understand it now. This whole thing is a plant. It's a plot. It's a plot to get rid of your wife."

He half raised his hand; but he lowered it again. It lay heavy with its weight of diamonds against the black embroidered cloth of his knee. Cousin Hat rushed on.

"La Bellissima refuses to give you an heir: she believes that she knows what will happen all too soon if she does. And so—La Bellissima must go. But this is the twentieth century and even in San Juan you can't just execute her out of hand; like La Madre and El Bienquisto 'she would be missed.' So Juanita is to be consulted—in public. I don't think you really care two hoots, Exaltida, about the Archbishop. He's just a sort of—forerunner: to soften the people up, to accustom them to the idea that if Juanita is appealed to in vain, it means that she countenances an execution. La Bellissima will appeal for a son and heir. Juanita will not answer. And so ... On Juanita's shoulders falls the responsibility for another 'judicial execution.'"

There was a long, long silence, broken only by a tiny, dry scaly sound which Miss Cockrill at last identified as the chafing of her own shaking fingers. What would happen now?—for one could not hope to inspire a second burst of laughter. Could judicial execution be extended to visiting foreigners? There'd be a fuss at home, she thought, and it was odd how comforting that was; she had a fleeting glimpse of the Major hawking his red face and white moustache from Consulate to Embassy, from Foreign Office to—to War Office, even? But life was a little weary, anyway, and not so very much to offer for that young and lovely life. As to the San Juan gaol—she would rather not. Her brother had spent a few hours as its involuntary guest and reported *most* unfavourably. She wished the Grand Duke would speak.

He spoke at last. He was dangerously mild. "The matter would appear to be in the hands of the Grand Duchess. Why is she so obstinate in the matter of having a child?"

Cousin Hat shrugged hopelessly. "She imagines she will lose her looks."

"What nonsense! Women nowadays don't lose their looks."

Cousin Hat thought back to the sunlit afternoon, to the slender figure in the flower-starred green satin, sitting with her hands full of flowers on the flower-starred grass. 'La mère m'a dit....' "Her mother seems to have given a very urgent warning."

"Her mother is a ridiculous woman. Why should La Bellissima lose her looks? And if she did—she would be still my wife."

"Not for long, however," said Cousin Hat, with temerity.

He considered it. He said at last: "I see. So either way ... But to have had a child would at least have been to—postpone matters?"

"No doubt." She looked him in the face. "La Bellissima, however, Exaltida, has a foolish preference. If she must die, she would rather die a little sooner—still lovely at least, in your eyes."

He bent his head sharply and sharply glanced away from her; and there was a look on his face that lit in her breast a sudden bright blaze of hope. It's only that

they're—lost, she thought. They don't understand one another—that's all it is: they've lost their way. And her chill heart lifted with joy within her and she thought: 'Behind all this façade of terror and misunderstanding, these two marvellous creatures are in love!' If only—if only one could find a way to help them. If only it could be she, plain, practical Harriet Cockrill, living her one brief hour against this magical tapestry, half sombre, half star-bright, of mystery and romance—if only it could be she who might be inspired to find the right moment and so speak the right word....! And she had a vision suddenly, an old maid's vision of the fairy-tale ending, a picture of happy-ever-after at the end of a story book: he tall and fine and handsome—she gentle and lovely, sitting beside him in their fairy-tale palace, looking up into the face of a beautiful boy. And with them, benevolently beaming, a little old lady, plain, unimportant and yet much loved, for ever valued: because it was she who had brought all this about....

Where had she, very recently, seen this picture before? A picture so grouped: the two of them, the Duchess holding a child by the hand; an old woman looking on....

And she looked at her picture again; and now the shadows shifted and changed and she saw that the face of the child was not the sweet, handsome, frankly smiling face of a fairytale boy, but a pudgy, white lardy-cake face with black boot-button eyes; and the face of the old woman was not her own face but a much older face, a much, much older, a terrible, a malevolent old face: which, far from being benevolently beaming was not beaming at all....

"La Madre! What fools we've been!" said Cousin Hat.

An old, old woman; and in her life, one love, one only passion of interest left—a little boy. And the boy is heir to great possessions and in their way stands nothing but one frail vessel, which yet may hold the seed of—another little boy. La Madre!—mother of Juanita, whom a French girl in her own language called 'La Mère'—looking on while the heir to the Dukedom of San Juan talked to the woman who must not be allowed to dispossess him of his rights.

"And El Bienquisto speaks French," said Miss Cockrill, "and could translate between them. I remember now that I saw him speaking to her—to La Bellissima. And she was friendly and kind to him, it was evident that they saw at least something of one another. In La Madre's apartments, I dare say?"

"The boy has tutors," admitted the Grand Duke. "La Bellissima has been helping him with his French."

"In La Madre's apartments?"

He agreed slowly. "It may be so."

She was suddenly exhausted. It had been a strain. But she made one more effort, striving for coherency, for power to convince. "You speak French with the Grand Duchess, Exaltida. I don't know about your French—mine is not very good. I misunderstood her; I caught only half of what she said to me. And if there could be misunderstanding between her and me, don't you think that you and she, also, might have got things wrong?" And she burst out suddenly: "How could she tell you, how could she explain to you?—what horrors was that old woman filling her up with? and all passed on, all translated, by that dreadful child." He remained silent. She said, despairingly: "You can't forgive her for believing such things of you?" Still he did not answer and she tried for the last

time. "Your own mother, Exaltida—forgive me for asking; but how did she die?"

"She died in childbirth," said the Grand Duke. "I was a boy but I remember it very well. She died when my brother, Don Isidro's father, was born."

"Yes. Well, the Grand Duchess has been taught otherwise," said Cousin Hat. "And what your father is supposed to have done, she may be forgiven for believing you might do too." To her horror, two great tears had gathered in her eyes and now fell, slowly rolling down her weathered cheeks. It was a long time since Cousin Hat had shed a tear.

Two guards stood, cloaked and sabred, at a little distance from them, their round, black-mackintoshy hats like jet in the moonlight. The Grand Duke, not answering her, roused himself from his pillar and snapped his fingers. He spoke but she did not listen, she was too weary to battle with sharp commands in a foreign tongue. The man departed and in a moment came back with Loreнна. Loreнна was carrying Cristallo, the white cat. El Exaltida said: "Come here, my child."

"Exaltida?" said Loreнна, bobbing a reverence.

"Give me the cat." He took the cat into his arms and it clawed its way up the black cloak to his shoulder and clung there, its shining white head against his dark cheek. He put up his hand and pulled the pearl collar from its neck. "Hold out your hand."

Loreнна held out her little hand and he slipped the collar over it to her wrist. "You have performed your duties very prettily, my child, but now they are ended, sooner than we expected. Go back to the Senora Innocenta and tell her this. Tell her that I have said it is no fault of yours. She will hear from me." He held out his hand and she curtsied and caught his hand and held it for a moment to her lips, for a moment laid her soft cheek against the backs of his fingers; and crept away. It was bitterly disappointing. One might say that for handing round a few cakes and glasses one had been richly rewarded with a bracelet of pearls; but had the duties been otherwise, thought Loreнна as with her escort of guard she went away along the cool colonnade and out of the pavilion and back to the workaday world, she would not have cared one bit about the bracelet of pearls....

"Never mind, Cristallo," said the Grand Duke to the plundered cat. "You are perfect without it." To Miss Cockrill he said: "Senorita—do you share my passion for pink champagne?"

"I think a little something would be nice," acknowledged Cousin Hat, faintly.

A man brought a bottle in an ice-bucket, and some glasses. The Grand Duke filled two glasses. "But first—let me drink a toast, Senorita, if I may." He lifted his glass. "I drink to a very brave lady. With my admiration—and with deep gratitude."

"Oh, *thank* you, Exaltida!" said Cousin Hat; and burst into a positive boo-hoo-hoo of tears.

He sat very quietly beside her till the crisis was over. "I am sorry. I frightened you. I am a terrible fellow. Now and again, do you know," he confessed, "I think I am not very far removed from old Juan the Pirate himself."

"But you don't mean ...?" said Miss Cockrill, sniffing and snuffing into her handkerchief.

He laughed. "Oh, per Dios—no! I am a little more removed I hope, than you

think. The Grand Duchess, for example—do you really suppose I would hurt one single hair of her lovely head?”

“But, ‘Jane Seymour’...”

“It becomes a habit,” he said, laughing again, “to talk in symbols. And, as you suggested, my French—well, you must remember that I learned it at an English public school. So—the Duchess was stubborn about this matter of an heir, I could not threaten her with divorce because we have no divorce in San Juan; and then the old man comes out with this terrible sermon. I did not stop to think; I leapt after her into the carriage and I said to her, in effect, ‘In England, five hundred years ago, because a Queen failed to give the country an heir, the King chopped off her head: and San Juan is now just about where England was five hundred years ago....’ And since she apparently remained unimpressed, I went on to add a delicate hint by importing a possible successor.” He laughed again. “Of course I did not then know of your advice that a young woman should always do what her husband tells her.”

“But now all that is over?”

“No more of Jane Seymour’s little cheesecakes!”

“And—the old man?”

“The old man? Oh, the Archbishop.” He thought it over. “Very well, *Senorita*: you have done me a very great service today; and so, if it will please you, the *Arcevescovo* shall take his own time to die.”

The silly tears filled her eyes again. “Thank you. Then all such debts as you owe me are quite wiped out.”

“You must let me give you a pearl bracelet at least,” he said smiling. “We will rob another cat; I have dozens of cats.”

“A pearl bracelet! Can you see me,” said Cousin Hat, “riding round Heronsford on my bike with a pearl bracelet worth a fortune on my arm?”

“Well, then—something else. Come up to the *Palatio* tomorrow and select something from our treasures. *Tomaso di Goya* is their guardian, he will take you round—choose anything you please.”

“No, no,” she protested. “I did wish for something and it has been granted. That’s enough.”

“It is not enough for me. Make another wish. Come,” he said gaily, almost tenderly, “let me be the good fairy to you now, instead of the ogre. I will grant you three wishes. One you have had. Choose two more and whatever you wish shall be granted.”

“Is that a promise?” said Cousin Hat, suddenly.

He bowed delightedly. “A promise.”

“I am to wish any wish ...?”

“Any two wishes.”

“One will do for the moment,” said Miss Cockrill, “I am to wish any wish I care to think of: and it will be granted?”

“Just speak your wish.”

“Then I wish ...” She raised her glass and took a sip of champagne, eyeing him beadily over the curve of the rim. “I wish ... *Any* wish?” insisted Cousin Hat.

“Any wish,” he promised, laughing.

“Then I wish ... I wish ...” She got it out at last, all in one nervous rush, and then sat, struck dumb at her own temerity. “I wish you would tell me why it is,”

said Cousin Hat, "that you won't have Juanita canonised."

In the white and silver patio, meanwhile, there had been an upheaval. The Major, an old campaigner among the brandy glasses as elsewhere, was sufficiently experienced to know when 'nuff was 'nuff and, suddenly arriving—a little late—at the conclusion that that time had come, rose to his feet and announced abruptly that he must depart. The hotel had laid on a ferry service beginning at the half hour after midnight, and he must be at hand to shepherd his flock aboard if they did not care to stay longer. "Sorry-t'break-'pparty-'ckceckra-'ckceckra ..." He bowed this way and that, flourishing the white linen hat.

La Bellissima regretted. El Exaltida had hoped that they would spend the rest of the evening. Late nights were kept in San Juan on fiesta occasions, and they could all be taken home in the grand ducal barge. But Mr Cecil, was also of opinion that the time had come for the Major to depart. "You could go ahead with your party, no need for us to leave too."

Winsome was exhausted, she longed to be alone. "I think, on the whole, Mr Cecil, we should take the hotel boat."

Mr Cecil, however, was quite happy where he was; and would be even happier without Major Bull and Miss Foley. "If you're tired, dear, you go on with the Major."

"Whackeroo!" cried the Major, throwing up the round linen hat.

"Well, perhaps after all ..."

But Mr Cecil had had enough of the Major and of Winsome too. "Nonsense, ducky, the Grand Duke will excuse you, off you go!" He gave Major Bull a surreptitious prod with Miss Cockrill's parasol and, his uncertain balance thus upset, started him off at a trot which he did not recover till he had too positively left them to attempt to reconsider. Winsome, after more protracted leave-takings, perforce followed him. A guard of four men closed in about them at a sign from the Grand Duchess and, like prisoners, they were marched down to the arena and thrust through the swing and surge and sway of the crowd. "By Jove, Winnie, like being hauled to the scaffold, eh, what?"

"I think we've had enough of scaffolds for today," said Winsome.

"Well, I don't know. Chaps cheering, girls chucking flowers, 'sfar-far-better-thing-eckecekra-eckcekra. Go to th' scaffold any day with you, old girl," added the Major, ducking back nimbly into his role as adorer and throwing a heavy arm about her waist.

"Major Dick—please!" She released herself from him with a horrified wriggle. Was this the sort of behaviour that went on with Cousin Hat? "I think you are mistaking me for—for someone else."

"Someone else? Who else could I be mistaking you for? Gloria Swanson, perhaps? Eh, what?" The Major went off into a loud guffaw. "Sorry-disappoint-you, old girl, but that cat won't jump! No, no, poor old skinny-Winnie, nobody else, no such luck! Mind you, good girl, Winnie, damn fine filly, steel-blue, straight-blade, great Thingummy made my mate, 'cekra, 'cekra; but couldn't compare you with Swanson, old girl, don't know where you got such an idea." But still, old buffer—white—sarvice—couldn'taffordbep'tic'ler; the dancing crowds jostled them, despite the strong arms of the guard, and, pressed close

together, suddenly and distressingly face to face, he seized the opportunity to implant a resounding kiss somewhat askew upon her upper lip. "Name-day, Winnie, happiest-of-men, never-mind-old-hen-pheasant, we'll soon settle *her*." The crowd swept them apart again, swept them together, caught up in some terrible, high-stepping, involuntary pavanne. "Whackeroo!" cried the Major, throwing up the round linen hat; and Oh, God! thought Winsome, will this dreadful day never end?

It was a little dashing to find his party greatly disgruntled at his absence, Fuddyduddy waiting only to get back to the hotel to dash off a letter to the company demanding a refund, D. and V. in extremis, and the widows strangely inclined to rushing away looking white and desperate every time he turned towards them. Happy, however, in his consciousness as an accepted lover, nothing left now but the trifling task of disposing of Hat with a kindly word of explanation, he set about the task of conducting his group home. His innamorata seemed disinclined to dalliance as the vaporetto puffed its way back beneath the stars, but the poor girl was doubtless dazed by her sudden happiness: a little overwrought. He hoped he had not been a bit rough with her, in his handling of that business of Gloria Swanson; but really, poor thing—what an illusion for her to have cherished! Much kinder and wiser to bring her down to earth eck dum! "Didn't hurt your feelings, just now, old girl, did I? But really, you know, I mean, 'pon my word—Gloria Swanson ..."

"Oh, go to bloody hell," said Winsome, "and take Gloria Swanson with you...." Overwrought.

The Vaporetto de Muerte was returning from her first trip back to San Juan, crawling like some slow, black, living creature down the silver path of the moonlight. She gave three blasts on her siren as she drew near the mooring-place—whoo!whoo!whoo ...! 'The obscure bird,' thought Cousin Hat, paralysed with panic now, at what she had done, 'clamour'd the live-long night ...' But the Grand Duke, after the first moment of startled amazement had burst into another of his tremendous fits of laughter. "Senorita—you are indomitable! You are magnificent! You are superb! And the courage ...!" He shook his head, laughing at her with that air of indulgent admiration that she was beginning to recognise. "To think that so small a nut should hold such a kernel of resolution! She comes to my island, she marches with her small flag flying, into a stronghold of unopposed tyranny that has lasted two hundred years; she ticks me off as though I were a schoolboy, upsets all my arrangements and now demands to know state secrets that have been guarded throughout our history like the palace treasures themselves...."

"Well, I shan't repeat it," said Cousin Hat, a trifle stuffily.

He sobered down a little. "No. This, Senorita, I implicitly believe; or I should be obliged to break my promise. To no one, ever, must one word of this be murmured. But I know that it is safe with you, without my even asking; and so, Senorita, I must keep my promise, I must tell you the answer to your question. And when I have told you—then, Senorita, three people will know it, instead of two. I shall know it: Juan Lorenzo, El Illustre, El Splendore, El Magnifico, El Exaltida, Gran' Duca di San Juan el Pirata—he will know it. El Patriarca—Don Luis Anselmo, El Beatitud, El Santo, etcetera, etcetera, Patriarca di Peurto de

Barrequitas, in the island of San Juan el Pirata—he will know it. And Miss Cockrill, a lady visitor from a little country town in England—she will know it.” He went off into roars of laughter again. “It is superb! In all the world—only these three!”

“Well, I don’t see what it can be,” said Cousin Hat, intrigued. “If you mean that you think that she wasn’t a saint at all ...?”

“Oh, no, no,” he said. “I make no secret of that!”

“And yet you don’t want to apply to Rome?”

“I do want to apply to Rome,” said the Grand Duke. “I want more than anyone else in San Juan, to apply to Rome. Not applying is bringing me endless trouble and will bring much more. Already it is being used against me among my people—there is a young hothead in Barrequitas, Tomaso di Goya, an ignorant, malcontent fellow—he is using it to inflame his followers....”

“Oh,” said Cousin Hat, startled. “You know about Tomaso di Goya?”

“Of course I know; I know most things in San Juan el Pirata. And the Arcivescovo—whose life I have just granted to you, I know also that he is one of di Goya’s pupils and, having nothing to lose, a most dangerous old man. And the Gerente de Polito, who controls the only men trained in any sort of combat on this island.”

“El Gerente is being fooled by the goldsmith,” said Miss Cockrill, loyal to her friend.

“You, also, appear to know a lot about it?” said the Grand Duke, rather sharply.

She remembered the conversation in the Joyeria on the first day of her arrival. “If they are dangerous to you—why don’t you remove them?”

He shrugged. “Tomaso di Goya is a good goldsmith; his father knew my family heirlooms by heart, the son has inherited valuable knowledge, it would be a job to replace him. And El Gerente is at the centre of the smuggling business which brings so much profit to San Juan and keeps the people busy; to despatch him would throw the whole business into confusion. Besides ...” Besides, his shrug said, it is beneath me to trouble to flick these poor insects out of the way. All the same ... “Between the lot of them, I confidently expect to be murdered one day: and all because of this business of Juanita.”

“Then, why not——?”

He leaned forward and poured more champagne, his left hand supporting the cat, so that it should not slip forward and down from his shoulder. It remained, however, calmly snoozing there, its white head flattened like a snake’s against the folds of the black cloak. He straightened himself again, and lounged back in his chair. “Miss Cockrill—all England is dotted, is it not? with ‘monsters’ in ‘secret rooms’—inhuman creatures bred from generation to generation into the great families, kept by them, hidden away from the eyes of the world, the terrible secret passed on, at the eve of the coming-of-age, from father to eldest son. Such stories are told of the aristocracy of every country. Well ...” He glanced round to be certain that no one was anywhere in earshot. “Well, Miss Cockrill—the fact is that San Juan has a monster too!”

“A monster——?”

“Oh, this time not a Thing in a hiding-hole; but a secret, nevertheless, handed down, as I said, from father to son; and to nobody else—handed down, now, for

two hundred years, never in all those years, known to more than three people at any one time: to the reigning Grand Duke, to the Heir, when he attains his majority, and to the Patriarch as head of the Church. The Patriarch is told immediately upon his accession to that dignity. He is chosen for the post—by the Grand Duke—as being likely to accept the secret and to keep it. If later he shows signs of not doing so, he is liquidated at once; mortality among newly created Patriarchs is distressingly high. The present incumbent, however, has proved most amenable: we couldn't have managed it with the Arcivescovo—my father promoted this man over his head, for that reason. The Obispo, however, is coming along very nicely. I shan't have any trouble in my generation.”

“And the secret?” said Cousin Hat, going quietly mad with curiosity.

“The Roman Catholic Church,” said the Grand Duke, “rests on the foundation of the Apostolic Succession. Christ ordained Peter His first bishop: and those whom Peter ordained, ordained others and so on, down through the generations in unbroken succession. In the Catholic church, no priest ordained out of this chain of succession, is a priest at all. His Mass is no Mass, he administers the Sacraments and they are meaningless forms—he may become in his time a bishop and ordain other priests, but he is not a bishop and they are not priests _____”

“I see,” said Cousin Hat, slowly: beginning to see.

“And what sort of priests and bishops, Seniorita, do you think have flourished on my island, since Juan the Pirate first took shelter here? What sort of link do you suppose was formed in that great chain of succession, by whatever old rogue first wore a mitre in San Juan? No link, of course: and therefore the bishops he made were no bishops and the priests they made, no priests: and the sad fact remains, Seniorita,” said the Grand Duke, roaring with laughter, nevertheless, “that Catholic San Juan, island-child of Catholic Italy and Catholic Spain, is no more Catholic than you are; nor, for two hundred years has anyone here been christened or married or shriven or buried in the rites of our Mother Church. And *think* what would happen if anyone found that out!”

Cousin Hat thought of it, mulling it over in her mind, in her own straight, practical way. “It would be no fault of yours. You didn't begin it. The deception, I mean.”

“I continued it.”

“Under an oath of secrecy.”

“Dear lady—try telling that to the Juanese!”

“And anyway, what does it matter? These things are in the mind, in the intention.”

“Not in the Church of Rome. A Confirmation is not a Confirmation, let ten thousand people believe that they are seeing the real thing.”

“Well, no. And come to that,” acknowledged Miss Cockrill, “not only in Rome. A marriage illegally performed is no marriage anywhere; however much the people concerned may believe in it.”

“There has not been a legal marriage,” said the Grand Duke, laughing again, “in the island of San Juan for something like two hundred years.”

“But the civil ceremony ...?”

“We have no civil ceremony; in San Juan, the state does not interfere.”

“Oh, dear,” said Cousin Hat.

"I should have to begin by explaining that the whole pious population was living in sin: that their fathers and mothers had lived in sin, that they themselves were bastards and their children were bastards too. You could not blame them," said El Exaltida, "begging your pardon in advance for my language, if the people decided that their Grand Duke was the biggest bastard of all."

"And the Patriarca?"

"El Patriarca, handles all business with Rome. The Archbishop and the Bishop confine themselves to home affairs. There is, of course, in fact no business with Rome. She has in the past made enquiries, but since we are really not part of the Church at all, she has no jurisdiction here. Any attempt at interference would be immediately put down, no missionaries of any sort are permitted on the island—you will have noted that our frontier arrangements are extremely exclusive. And the language difficulty is so enormous that nobody who did get here could do very much; nor are our people—for this very reason—encouraged to travel. Here again, the language difficulty helps; to the Italian and Spanish-speaking people, a grasp of Juanese is almost impossible and vice versa—much more so than with the French, German, English, etcetera, who learn it from scratch. So that the threat from Italy is not so great as would at first appear. Nevertheless," said the Duke with another of his shrugs, "it must be admitted that we live on something of a volcano."

"And Juanita——?"

"May well promote the first rumble."

"I do see that you can't very well in the circumstances apply to the Roman Church to canonise a saint who wasn't her saint at all. But ..." She reflected. "The Patriarch must, if you don't mind my saying so, do a good deal of 'business' with Rome, which Rome knows nothing about. Couldn't he, perhaps....?"

"'Arrange' the business of Juanita? It has been discussed. But it is too dangerous. The canonisation of a new saint is not a mere local affair: it is a matter of rejoicing through all the organisation of the Catholic Church and that is world-wide. Even my people would observe that there was a very odd hush regarding their own particular protégé—no visits from papal representatives, no gifts of blessings or 'special indulgences' attaching to the shrine—though most of that, I suppose, the Patriarch could attend to. But above all, no world press. No. It is tempting and, as I say, it has been discussed—it was talked over in my father's day at the time she died—I, of course, was a schoolboy then—and it has been canvassed ever since. But the risk is too great. So there you are! You asked me a question and there is the answer: and if you were to betray me, Senorita, I think it would not be too much to say that the fate of my house, and the fate of this whole island people, would be in your hands. Why do I not apply to the Church of Rome for canonisation of our saint? Because for two hundred years our island has not been part of the Church of Rome at all!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BREAKFAST on the island of San Juan is like breakfast almost anywhere else on

the continent of Europe: something to recall in wistful retrospect through the long, bleak months between, but consisting in fact of gritty grey coffee, flaccid, white butter, rolls of very hard, sour bread and chipped saucers of extraordinarily nasty apricot jam. At the Bellomare, however, it is served on the terrace beneath the twisted grey bougainvillea boughs, looking out to sea; and here, on the morning after the fiesta di Boia, Miss Cockrill sat very complacently, caged into a square wooden garden chair and awaited her faithful Dick. He arrived at last, a trifle wan, and was immediately besieged by his flock. "Hey, waiter! Here, garsong!" cried the Major desperately, clutching at the coat-tails of the drifting waiters, "bring tea, this senora no want coffee, bring tea. And eggs. Eggsa. Eggsa and bacon. No want apricot jam."

"Si, si, Senor," said the waiters, strolling away to bring coffee and apricot jam.

"And be quick, hurry, despacio...."

"My dear Dick," said Miss Cockrill, "'despacio' means to go slowly."

"Oh, does it? Well there's no need," acknowledged Dick gloomily, "to tell them to do that."

For the Major this morning was not his usual self. Awakening, ill at ease in stomach and head, he had lain for a little while conscious also of a dull cloud over the heart, which as his mind grew clearer had sharpened into a stab of realisation which filled him with a very genuine horror. Engaged! He was an engaged man. Last night—last night, and he must face it, he had drunk too much and had behaved disgracefully; had made a fool of himself, had been tipsily insulting, and finally had offered his hand, irrecoverably pledged his troth—for the Major with all his faults was a thorough-going gentleman—and to, of all people, Winnie! But Hat! He covered his large pink face with his hands at the thought of the interview to come, the white hairs of his moustache sprouting through his fingers like a handful of etiolated mustard-and-cress on a saucer of red flannel. All these years of weary pursuit of one whom he knew in his own foolish, faithful, and very lonely heart to be the one woman in the world for him: and a sunny day and a moonlit night had undone his work in an hour. Nor could he ever explain, even to Hat, that he had not been sober when he took the fatal step. Honour forbade. He must stick to his promise; and live out the rest of his life without even the comfort of her friendship left to him.

There was a telephone at the bedside and he sat down at last, a saggy heap in

candy-striped pyjamas, and reached for the receiver. "Winnie? I say—g'morning, old girl. Dick here."

"Major Dick!" said Winsome, astonished, automatically adjusting her nightgown at the sound of the male voice so vibrant in her chaste boudoir.

"Not too early for you, old girl, eh? Fact is, Winnie, I behaved very badly last night. That business about Gloria Swanson...."

Winsome, also, had lain awake for some time already, her long face alight with nourishing cream, her hair kept in wave beneath a sort of net bonnet tying under the chin, which gave her the look of a huge, gaunt, glistening baby, preternaturally wise. But she did not feel very wise. The Mediterranean sunshine streamed through the slats of her shutters and in its gay sanity she looked back with horror to the events of the evening before. She, Winsome Foley, a cheat and a fraud, and in a matter of godliness; afraid for her freedom, afraid for her very life—at the mercy of a blackmailer, committed to some unholy adventure in partnership with a sloe-eyed gipsy who, had he dared ever to lean over the garden gate at home with his basket of brushes or offers to mend kettles and pans, would have been chased off with the business end of Brother Hoe! I must get away, she thought. I must tell Cousin Hat what has happened, I must confess everything to her, and ask her to cut short our holiday and come away at once.

I must tell Cousin Hat. I must tell her that I agreed—I suggested—that a fraud should be perpetrated; that to this end I handed over the sacred book which was entrusted to my sole care; that I permitted that, in my presence, a forgery should be interpolated there. I must tell her that a great deal of this I did under the influence of drink: that I went alone with this man to his shop and allowed him to make me tipsy so that I should be brought to agree. I must tell her that from first to last, by flattery, he has made a fool of me; and that now he is blackmailing me into taking an active part....

If it were indeed blackmail. Perhaps, after all ... She remembered the laughing eyes, the protesting hands: one must put oneself into the minds of these people, minds utterly different, ideas and ideals utterly different from our own. 'I mean only that if you had not intended to go on with the plan you would surely not have altered the book.' That was fair enough; and in case of discovery, he had been anxious for her protection, she must maintain steadily, he had said, that she had never touched the thurible; 'whatever happened' she must stick to that and he and the Archbishop would support her. And he had taken her arm and smiled and teased and said that it was an adventure, it was fun ... Of course I must not take the censor, she thought; but I don't really believe he was blackmailing me.

And besides ...

Besides, if the adventure fell through—there was a great deal to lose.

It was not for me, she thought. It is for Juanita. But what benefited Juanita, indubitably also greatly benefited herself. She caught sight in a mirror of the great baby face in its blue net bonnet, and turned away her eyes to avoid their own uneasy stare. Two alternatives—both very simple, and both of them terrible. To confess, to go home at once with Cousin Hat, and to live in the chill shadow of her scorn for ever; or to grow rich and independent of Hat—by carrying out the plan. There is no other way, she thought; and which am I to do?

The telephone rang. It was Major Dick. Some gabble about Gloria Swanson. "Gloria Swanson, Major Dick?" Had the man gone mad?

"Behaved like a cad, old girl," said the Major, almost weeping. "I was drunk. Bound to admit it. Disgraceful business. Ashamed of myself." His sad blue eyes stared out of the window opposite his bed at the cloudless blue of the Mediterranean sky. He took a deep breath. "Regard myself as an engaged man, Winnie, old girl y'know. Hope you understand that?"

"Engaged?" said Winsome: absolutely incredulous.

"By Jove, yes," said the Major, loyally. (Happiest man in the world, eckceckra, eckceckra.) "Only for God's sake don't—well, I mean, let's keep it a secret between ourselves for the moment, eh, what? I mean, on the whole, don't say anything yet to Hat."

"No, all right," said Winsome faintly. But the Major had rung off.

'Engaged! To be married! All of a sudden to find it assumed that one was engaged to be married: all of a sudden to find oneself with a third alternative, after all. Weary and depressed, obsessed with her own anxieties, she had taken in very little of what he had said to her during the return from the pavilion the evening before; and remembered even less. But she recalled now that he had put his arm about her waist, had poked his moustache into her face as though to kiss her; and it was true that up at the pavilion he had seemed rather odd and excited, snatching drinks from the tray offered by the girl, Loreнна, and tossing them off in a sly sort of feverish way. Afraid of Cousin Hat; stoking up a little Dutch courage because he wanted to ask her to marry him, and was afraid of Cousin Hat. But she, no longer, need be afraid of Cousin Hat. After the long years of waiting, he had tired of Cousin Hat; and she, Winsome, had beaten Cousin Hat at her own game. Engaged. To be married. Independent of Cousin Hat. She would give the conspirators a chance, she would go up to the cathedral this morning and tell the Archbishop, quite coolly, that she refused to accept the censer or to have anything more to do with the plot; and if there was trouble, she would tell Cousin Hat, as coolly, that she thought it would be advisable if she went home sooner than intended. Meanwhile she would send down a message that she had a headache and would not get up.

Major Dick was present when the message arrived and accepted it with relief. Later, Cousin Hat went up to the sufferer's bedroom and said that really she was not surprised, last night Winsome had looked quite dotty, she had better stay where she was; she herself was going off on an expedition with Dick and the others to the village of Toscanita. Winsome heard the clip-clop of horses' hooves as the carriages assembled outside the front door, the hooting of the tourists as they piled themselves in (the widows packed into one carriage for their safety's sake). The hooves clip-clopped away. She got up and dressed.

And Mr Cecil also remained behind. Mr Cecil takes little pleasure in rural delights and he had been, moreover, charmingly piqued in his ever-sensitive curiosity, by the tenor of Tomaso's leave-takings the night before. Alone among the group, Mr Cecil had known of a plot to doctor the Cellini thurible with an essence of roses: and why, Mr Cecil had asked himself, should the originator of the plot be gazing so meaningfully into poor Foley's stupefied face and insisting that she keep to some arrangement regarding that same thurible? He himself, Tomaso had insisted, again most meaningfully, would not be there. Mr Cecil decided that he, on the other hand, certainly would be there: and accordingly, that morning at eleven o'clock, presented himself, all eager-eyed at the sacristy

door of the cathedral.

Those who love the Duomo di San Juan, and they are not many, are apt to exalt it above all other cathedrals: though chiefly, they acknowledge, on the score of the saving in travel. For why, ask these Phillistines, dash from Bologna to Sienna, from Sienna to Ravenna, from Ravenna to Rome, when by staying quietly in one place you may see bricks as bloodily red as any in Bologna, a forest of American convicts' legs more fiercely black-and-white striped than those of Sienna, mosaics more hideous and a front more putti-ed with babies' bottoms than in all Ravenna or Rome? The Duomo of course was built by old Juan the Pirate—unique, perhaps, in having been erected in his own lifetime, to his own glory, by a man who had just canonised himself a saint (for the Patriarch of that day had had no foolish prejudices about applications to Rome). Having impressed half a dozen men of, unfortunately, varying talent, by the simple expedient of kidnapping them from the Italian ports where they happened to be working, he provided an armed guard to protect them from one another, and bade them set to. A native of Parma came out on top with a general outline of Romanesque basilica, in bright red brick (the guide book is surely incorrect in its figures?—32,453 metres by 6,420—for this would make it twice the length of St Peter's and anyway a very odd shape), surrounded by graffiti pavements depicting scenes from the life of the saint in a version which that deplorable old party would certainly not have recognised, had he lived to see them completed.

But the other protagonists struggled not in vain. Venice contributed domes of assorted sizes and peppered with nice, bright mosaics, there is a patchwork tower, à la Giotto, and of course the façade—the most somtous, the guide book assures us, of any in Europe. 'Let's now going up to the frontal,' continues this work in its pleasantly informal way; and, conducting us thither, encourages with cries of uninhibited complacency our admiration of San Juan's supremacy in a sort of Swedish smörgesbrod of marble. 'Entering through portles of bronze into the specious interior, lets now revolving from left to right. Here we are hit by lots of thinks most marvelous and suggestive of which now we give to the reader the history the most briefly and faithful is possible ...' The tomb of the Founder, for example, credited to Canova (but not by anyone outside San Juan, the more so as he would at the time it was fashioned, have been about nine years old), the great marble font, piratical loot but *not* the work of either of the Pisanos, the murals of Goya; and, in a wrought-iron case, the Cellini thurible—which really is by Cellini....

El Anitra came shuffling out at Mr Cecil's summons, his great flaming nose hanging like a beacon over the sad, thin mouth, the whole face mottled with colour, purple and scarlet as the feathers of the bird whose name he bore; the white, raised scar gleaming on the frontal bone. "I regret, Senor, infinitely; the thurible is removed for cleaning before the fiesta, it is not on view."

"Ooh, you naughty fib!" said Mr Cecil. "One of the tourists is viewing it this minute, I've just seen her arrive."

"Ah, yes, the lady; that is by special arrangement."

Oh, but one had a special arrangement oneself, said Mr Cecil. Last night he had been up at the pavilion: the Archbishop was doubtless aware of it?—and the Grand Duke....

"You have a signed note?" said the Archbishop wretchedly.

Mr Cecil had no signed note. Understanding that Miss Foley had an appointment, the Grand Duke had simply told him to go along too.

"I will speak to the lady," said the Arcivescovo.

But that, protested Mr Cecil, there was utterly, but utterly, no need to do. He was a friend of Miss Foley, she wouldn't mind one bit. He followed the old man resolutely across the sanctuary and in through the sacristy door.

The base of the censer was a large thing, as big as a rose bowl and enormously heavy, of solid gold wrought into a design of upward-bearing angels. Mr Cecil watched with malicious glee the Archbishop's efforts to manœuvre it surreptitiously into the lady's bag, the lady for some reason not co-operating; though he had understood it to have been all arranged, the night before. He succeeded at last and Mr Cecil, having foiled an attempt on Winsome's part to leave the bag behind in the sacristy, emerged at last with her out into the sunshine. "Do let me carry your bag for you. It seems dreadfully heavy."

Quite all right, said Winsome. She could manage it herself.

"But, my dear, what on earth have you been buying? Gold bricks?"

No, no, it was just some—just some guide books....

"Very nobbly guide books," said Mr Cecil, eyeing the distended bag with a mischievous eye. He tripped along gaily beside her across the cobbled cathedral square. "Where shall we go now? Let's sit down and have an ice, and we can look at your new guide books together."

But Winsome had suddenly developed a passion to pop in (alone if it had been humanly possible but it was not) to the Joyeria; and, having with many explanations and excuses scribbled a note which she concealed in the shopping bag with the nobbly guide books, dragged herself there with her old man of the sea; and, after looking vaguely at some brooches which, said Mr Cecil had not been worth so imperative a visit, abruptly came away. This time he was content to allow her to carry her own shopping bag; it seemed so very much lighter.

Alone in his shop, Tomaso locked away his little bomb carefully and turned his attention to the thurible. It was no longer true, of course, that the work could be made undetectable; to arrange the mechanism so that the bomb operated only when the censer was swung forward, was a different matter from concealing a pellet of essence. But until the event, no one would think of examining the bowl except possibly the old man and this foolish woman and neither of those two would understand what he saw. And after the event—there would be nothing left to examine. A tragedy, he thought, the artist for a moment overcoming the anarchist, to destroy so lovely, so wonderfully lovely, a thing. He turned it over in tender hands, tracing with his delicate fingertip the intricacy of moulding, laying his brown cheek against broad surfaces of gold made smooth as silk by the polishing hands of time. I will sketch it, he thought, and one day I will make another, as lovely if I can, to replace it. It should be his life's hobby, his relaxation in the days of power to come.

There was a note with the censer: it was in Juanese, not very well constructed or properly spelt, though she spoke it fluently enough, and tremendously underlined. Writing in a *great hurry, under difficulties*, she said. Had not intended to bring the thing, but *had not been able to explain this to the Archbishop*. So she had brought it. *But this was the end, she would do no more*. Well, all right, he thought, you need do no more—about the censer. She had known too much of

the original plan, it had been necessary to involve her so that when the assassination took place, she should, to save her own skin, keep her mouth shut. But now she was involved, and as to taking the thing back, he could take it back himself, easily enough. He was as free as anyone else to pray in Juanita's chapel, he would go along with a couple of disinterested friends as future witnesses; he would put the parcel down somewhere, the Archbishop could pick it up. He thought with satisfaction of the forgery in the book, of the carrying of the censer, under the very eye of Senor Thetheelah; his Senorita del Opale was safe enough—when the time came she would not talk.

A tourista came in. It was the fat man, the leader of the group, the Major. Tomaso slid his work beneath the counter. "Bienvenida, Senor. Buon giorno."

"Yes, well, er, bwonjorny," said the Major. He broke into French. "Dayzeery ern reeng."

"A reenga?" said Tomaso in English, not to be outdone. Sure thing, he said. With happy. One tiny!

"Well, by Jove, er, not too tiny," said the Major, thinking back to the noded knuckles of his affianced.

Tomaso was mystified. They looked it up in the dictionary "Tiny: small, miniature, minute." "Poor feller means, 'one minute,'" said the Major, going off into a guffaw in Tomaso's face; but Tomaso laughed too, an excellent little joke. He congratulated the Major warmly upon what was evidently a conquest, promised to keep his secret, and repaid the guffaw by selling him at exorbitant price, an opal twenty times inferior to Winsome's own.

And that night there was a party at the Joyeria; or above it, rather, in the white-washed roof patio, looking out over the crooked-tiled roofs of Barrequitas and away to the sea. Tomaso had arrived suddenly at the Bellomare with pressing invitations to Senorita Cockereel, to her niece Senorita Foley, Senor Thetheelah—to those friends who had been so kind as to patronise his shop.... Major Bull, alas, he knew from a chat with him earlier in the day—when they met *in the street*, said Tomaso, prodigiously winking—was obliged to remain with his group; but for the rest, there was always a reaction after Domenica di Boia, it was his habit to ask in a few friends, would they not come too and enjoy a real Juanese evening? To Winsome he muttered an urgent aside; this was the only way he could arrange to see her, she must come, something had gone wrong....

The patio was enchanting, cool and white and clean as a whistle, bright with great bunches of flowers in coloured clay pots; a table was heaped with fruit and cheeses and spicy little Juanese dishes, there was a cold, clear, sweet white wine in a great carafe. After the fever of the night before, it was wonderfully peaceful: two or three pretty girls, a couple of the charming plump little middle-aged dumplings that Innocenta (not present) typified; half a dozen smiling brown men, the inevitable cat. They sat and talked, idly, in the dying sunshine, they spoke of dancing, a girl got up and, natural as a flower, did a few steps to show the Senorita what she meant, another girl shouldered her aside, laughing, and repeated the steps with variations.... A man produced a guitar and strummed a few bars for the girls to dance to, broke away from the dance and began to play a tune of his own. A girl took up the tune, made words to it, teasing the dancers for being deprived of their music; broke, still singing, into a dance of her own.... Winsome, next to Tomaso who lounged easily in the doorway leading from the

room to the balcony, leaned back into the shadows. "What is this 'trouble'?"

"What trouble? Oh, yes, the 'trouble.' There is no trouble; only the trouble of transporting my valuables down to the boat in the reeds on the Toscanita shore. You said you would help me; I cannot go down there alone."

"You brought me here on a trick!"

"It is all a trick," he said, laughing. "You and I are playing a little trick on San Juan; to get you to come here, I played a little trick on you."

"Well, I am *not* coming down to Toscanita."

"I am not asking you to do anything, *Senorita*, but to come with me. I must have an excuse. I cannot be seen going down there alone, I am a man from Barrequetas, I do not belong there. But if I care to take a *tourista* to see the bay by moonlight..."

"By moonlight?" she said sharply.

"A carriage is waiting. You long to see Toscanita by the light of the moon."

"I couldn't possibly go, what would my cousin think?"

"She would think that you long to see Toscanita by the light of the moon."

"Alone with *you!*" said Winsome: unwisely.

"It would not be the first time you had been alone with me. By the way, your Major," said Tomaso, innocently, "was also in my shop today ..."

Cousin Hat viewed with some amazement her cousin's sudden enthusiasm for a drive to Toscanita. "Whatever does this fearful dago want with her?" she said uneasily to Mr Cecil as, with a dreadful assumption of gaiety, Winsome followed Tomaso across the patio and down through the Joyeria out into the street. "He wants to sell her something, it can't be anything else." Mr Cecil thought that upon the whole it could not be anything else. "But I'll go down and wish them God speed." He followed them out.

There was a carriage, sure enough, waiting below, with a nodding horse, wearing for the party a wreath of drooping flowers. Tomaso turfed the dozing driver off his seat and hauled her up, with some ungainly struggling, to sit beside him; and took up the reins. From the balcony above them, Cousin Hat looked rather anxiously down and he laughed and waved as they clattered away, flourishing the long, swiny whip, its lash permanently wound, since no Juanese driver would dream of using such a thing. Up the steep cobbled hill, the horse tugging away gallantly, delighted, as is the way of Juanese horses, to be of use. "This whole thing is blackmail," said Winsome, angrily.

"Blackmail! What ugly words you use! See how lovely this is, *Senorita*, looking down at the lights of the farmhouses in the dark plain; there to the left is the Colomabaia, if we are quiet for a moment we can hear the music.... Why are you not happy and gay? it is fun, an adventure." And down, far below, at the water's edge, he said, nestling among the reeds like a swan on its nest, his boat was lying. The carriage was packed with valuables, all ready, they must take them down to the boat and stow them away: there were many safe hiding places, for, naturally, the boat was used for smuggling. He broke off to address the horse. "Come, friend, you can do a little better than this? It is uphill, we know, but it isn't such a load, only two of us...." And sure enough, before they had breasted the rise, the horse shook its head, suddenly, and broke into a trot....

"I rode with them a little way," said Mr Cecil, reporting to Cousin Hat, fifteen minutes later. He looked very dusty, not at all his impeccable self. And he didn't

think Tomaso was trying to sell anything. On the other hand, he added comfortingly, he didn't think it was anything else, either.

"Well, I never really thought *that*," said Cousin Hat.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE day of the fiesta dawned like any other self-respecting day in San Juan—cloudlessly blue, with gentle promise of a breeze to blow in later over the sunlit seas and cool down the noonday heat. By six o'clock in the morning, all the world was astir, by seven every door had its garland, every girl a rose in her hair, every cat a blue bow; by eight o'clock there stretched across the great square of the Duomo, up the shallow steps and right through the body of the church to the altar rails, a pathway carpeted with an intricate pattern of the petals of countless flowers; by nine o'clock ...

By nine, El Gerente had his men posted all about the cathedral and had seen them settling down to snacks of bread and garlic and their double-spouted carafes of rough red wine, and was making his way back across the square to drown his own agonised anxieties in *arguadiante* at a near by *albergo*. Mr Cecil caught him up and tittupped along beside him. "My dear, you do look gorgeous, positively resplendent!"

"You think so, Senor?" said El Gerente, gratified. He sat down at a small table and rather ostentatiously crossed his legs, swinging one careless foot in a huge white gym. shoe.

"But radiant! And the *hat*!" Mr Cecil looked at it wistfully. The courage!—to take a brim like a large gramophone record and simply break it across the back and turn it up flat against the crown. "If only one could get one's silly clients ... But they won't. I tried last time." A waiter approached and he ordered coffee for himself and for the Gerente a brandy.

Guido shrugged. The hat was a hat. "But the shoes, Senor?"

"The shoes?" said Mr Cecil. It obviously mattered most dreadfully. He stared with loving concentration at the swinging foot. "Gerente! You've had them cleaned!"

"El Blanco," said Guido proudly: and it was true for there were little blobs of it, like tears, all round the heels, a cloud of it shot into the air with each swing, and there was a neat white collar round each bare ankle—it had obviously been applied while the shoes were on. "I do congratulate you. They're simply splendid."

"The Senor also is very fine," said Guido: a chop for a chop.

Mr Cecil bowed. He said carefully: "And Tomaso di Goya—he also."

"Tomaso?" said El Gerente sharply.

"I saw him just now, hurrying with his parcels off up the hill. Really," said Mr

Cecil languidly, "he'd have done better to borrow Don Isidro's bicycle these last few days."

Don Isidro's bicycle was by now the joke of San Juan. Tabaqui, the grey secretary, assiduous as ever in his master's service, had offered to learn to ride it himself, and so give La Madre confidence in its safety: and the Well-Belovéd had lost no time in giving it a shove that had landed rider and all in the nearest lily pool. The Grand Duke, enraged, had commanded El Gerente to drag out the wreck and have the whole thing consigned to the bottom of the sea; first, however, he had added coldly, removing the secretary. "El Bienquisto's bicycle, Senor, is lying in the harbour. I myself saw it thrown in there. What would Tomaso di Goya be doing with it?"

"Popping up and down to Toscanita?" suggested Mr Cecil.

"To Toscanita?"

"Well—to the boat. You do know, of course," he said, sweetly, "that your partner in crime has a boat all ready in case?"

"Has a boat ...? My 'partner' ...? Senor," stammered El Gerente, as white as his shoes, "what is it you mean?"

"There!—I *thought* you didn't know. Well, the *meanie!*" said Cecil, quite passionately, "not at least to offer you a place in case things go wrong."

"Go—wrong?" faltered El Gerente.

"With the thurible, ducky," said Mr Cecil.

It is difficult to call back a Chief of Police and insist on his settling his bill. No doubt he was busy, reflected the proprietor of the albergo, and anxious, shooting off suddenly like that, with the little senor Inghlesi after him; and had quite forgotten. However ... He shrugged philosophically. Let God but grant a sign today from Juanita, and any man owning a café in the Piazza di Duomo, could afford to stand treat to the whole of the police force, for the rest of his life. And he had been right to keep quiet, for in a little while El Gerente was back with his friend and they had sunk two double brandies apiece and paid for the lot, before rushing off once more. To the excusados, no doubt: they both looked very ill.

El Gerente and Mr Cecil, however, had retreated to a spot less frequented than a public excusado (mixed) in the cathedral square on fiesta day; poor Guido trembling in every limb and Mr Cecil hardly less exercised. For a fine situation Mr Cecil's piece of innocent mischief had landed him into! "I assure you, Gerente, I knew nothing about any bomb...."

"Of course I thought, Senor, it was this you were speaking of."

"No, no, I just thought it was going to be a pellet...."

"Well, now you know, Senor. So what are we going to do?"

"What I ought to do, is go straight up and tell the Grand Duke."

"Per Dios, Senor Thetheelah, I beg, I beseech you ...! We have been friends, Senor, good friends over the years; many an arguadiente you and I have swallowed together, have you not been out in my boat with me, sat with me in my patio with my Pepita ... Pepita! It is for her, Senor, for my wife, for my innocent daughters...."

"Well, then, you go and tell him. You'll have saved his life, then; he won't punish *you*."

"Tell him! Senor, you do not know our Exaltida. The Grand Duke," said El Gerente, with a touch of understatement, "is not a reasonable man."

And there was Winsome: poor silly Foley with her goose-gog eyes, caught up in the toils of an assassination plot. Not that she would know for one moment that murder was intended: but the Grand Duke, as El Gerente had most truly said, was *not* a reasonable man. "We must get hold of Tomaso di Goya. Let him remove the bomb and make the censor safe and perhaps we need say nothing."

"Senor, there is less than an hour to go before the Mass begins."

Less than an hour. Already the thurible swung from its golden chains on its golden stand before the Grand Duke's prie-Dieu, already an altar boy, efficient on this great occasion as never before, had ignited the charcoal which would smoulder there, lazily glowing, till the sprinkled incense sent up its aromatic fumes to heaven.... "And Tomaso has gone down to Toscanita; I told you, I saw him going."

"You don't know where this boat is?"

"No, no, I just heard him telling the Senorita about it. I dropped off the back of the carriage, once I found where they were going." He did not take time off to explain. "And I've idly kept an eye on him since, dashing backwards and forwards—he must have found more and more stuff that just had to be taken." He thought it over anxiously. "He won't get in touch with you, when he comes back?"

"We planned to keep apart, not to be seen together; and in these crowds ..."

"Send out men to find him, tell them to give him an urgent message to come to you; say you'll be with the Arcivescovo in the Duomo. We must see the Arcivescovo."

"Si, Senor," said Guido, humbly. He called his lieutenants to him, issued instructions and sent them off at the double; and hastened, shoving his way with his great shoulders through the packed crowds in the square, to follow the popinjay figure that minced ahead of him, picking its way across the cobbles like a cat in the rain.

Precious minutes were lost in locating the old man, found at last on his knees in a dark little room off the main sacristy; many more precious minutes in reviving him from the fainting fits that followed on the revelation of the plot in which, so innocently, he had been involved. Outside, the crowds surged and jostled in the square, fighting their way good-temperedly through the bronze doorways, swarming up to the galleries, packing themselves away into two solid masses of humanity, one on either side of the flower-petal pathway that led from the main door to the two carved prie-Dieu. The choir was assembling, the organ broke into a tentative rumbling, in the sacristy the officiating priests knelt at their prie-Dieu offering up the Prayers before Mass. In their hidey-hole, the three conspirators entered into agitated counsel. There was no sign of Tomaso. "Had we not better, at least, remove the thurible in case he does not come?"

"Arcivescovo, what then shall we explain to El Exaltida?"

"Some story. Anything is better than leaving it there."

"But ... Serenity, by now the hot coals have been burning, may not this effect the sensitivity of the bomb?"

"I suppose it may be so," said the old man, slowly.

"Who, therefore, dare move it? It may explode at a touch."

"Nevertheless, we cannot leave it there. So, Gerente ..."

"Arcivescovo, per Dios! ... Serenity, it is not of myself that I think, it is of my

Pepita, it is of my little Giulietta, my Manuela, my Consuelo, my Quita....”

Mr Cecil had not spoken; but now he said: “Very well. I’ll move it.”

“You, my son? Certainly not.”

“And yet, Arcivescovo, it is true that the Senor Thetheelah has no wife, no daughters ...”

“God forbid,” said Mr Cecil, shuddering. He got to his feet. It was very odd to feel so cool and strong, so little afraid.

But the Archbishop stopped him. “If anyone moves the censor, it shall be me, who am old and have nothing to lose. But, Senor, after all, what El Gerente says is true. May not the bomb now be liable to explode at a touch? And the church is crowded, packed tight with men, women and children....”

“Tomaso did say,” said the Gerente, doubtfully, “that when it went off it would effect none but the Duke himself.”

“My son: the Grand Duke lifts the thurible, he takes a pace or two forward—away from the crowds—he swings it: all the people standing well back, out of respect for him; and the thing goes off. A different matter from carrying it right out through the crowds, all craning forward no doubt out of curiosity, and so to a place of safety.”

“El Gerente must have the people kept back,” said Mr Cecil. “We’ll have to explain things afterwards; you can say a tourista went mad and tried to run off with the treasure.” He said urgently: “It’s decided. Come on, quick! Tell your men to force the people back towards the West door and to clear the sacristy. I’ll take it forward, up across the altar steps, out that way, away from the people. You must keep them back....”

“My son ...”

“Arcivescovo, you’re ill, you’d faint with the weight of the thing and the strain; you wouldn’t get a yard with it, you’d fall and it would explode beneath you. Quick, let’s waste no more time. Come on, Gerente....” But he paused, lifting his head. “What’s that noise?”

A sound of people cheering. “It is too late,” said the Archbishop. “The Grand Duke has arrived.”

They stood for a long moment, paralysed into silence. “Very well, then. We shall have to warn him.”

“Senor, for the love of God, my Pepita, my little ones ...”

And poor old Foley. “Well, all right then. There’s only one other way. Arcivescovo ...”

Voices were calling. A head was popped round a door. “Has anyone seen El Anit—...? Oh, per Dios! Arcivescovo, pardon me, excuse me, I did not observe you in the darkness. Your Grace, Your Serenity, everyone is searching for you, the Grand Duke is arriving.”

“Very well, child; ‘El Anitra’ is coming.” He sketched a tiny cross in the air with two fingers. “Go in peace. You are forgiven.” He turned to Mr Cecil. “Quick, Senor, what then?”

“El Patriarca sings the High Mass. At the time of the incense making—where will you be?”

“To one side of the altar, about to read the Gospel for the day.”

“Before the Grand Duke takes the censor, you must interfere. Give any reason

or none, protest, make a fuss: say you are ill and faint, you can't stand the incense, say you have had a message from Juanita discouraging incense, say—yes, if it comes to it at last, say that this is Juanita's Sign! She has revealed to you that if the Grand Duke touches the thurible he is in danger. And, in the last resort ...”

“In the last resort ... My son, I am an old man, a dying man. In the last resort, *I* will take the thurible out of the Grand Duke's hands.”

The cheering outside had grown to a great roar, there were more voices urgently calling. “I must go, my children. Leave it to me. He shall be safe.” He raised his hand in a blessing. El Gerente fell to his knees and Mr Cecil to his own rather discomfited amazement, found himself doing the same. The old man laid a hand on each bowed head. “My son, Guido: God forgive you and protect you. My son, Thetheelah—God bless you and reward you.” He smiled at them both, a smile of great peace and sweetness on his ugly old, ravaged face, and made the sign of the cross again; and was gone.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE interior of San Juan, ordinarily so splendidly hideous, was today transformed to a miracle of loveliness: for instead of the blood-bath of red brick, one entered a vast domed pillared hall in which every inch of wall, every black-and-white striped convict's-leg, was hung with a watered silk brocade in the clear, deep green of the leaves of roses, all lit by the shimmer of a hundred chandeliers. Beneath its baldachino of barley sugar pink and white marble, the altar was massed with roses, pink and white, the national flower of San Juan; within the church, only rose petals had been used for the carpet of flowers, under her black veil, every woman wore a rose in her hair—the very air was so sweet with the scent of them that it was hard to see how anyone could have expected for one moment that Tomaso's poor pellet could even have been observed. The grand ducal carriages, arriving at the broad front steps, were festooned with them, the horses wore rose-wreaths in their Sunday-go-to-Meeting straw hats, the grooms had each a rose nodding gaily at the top of his tight-furled whip....

La Madre drove first, peering out balefully to right and left from her swaddling of black veils and shawls, one skinny hand appearing now and again, to give a sort of dig at the air in response to the pious salutations of the people. El Bienquisto sat in the carriage beside her, complacent in a white satin suit which, however, did *not* become him. Ladies and gentlemen of the court followed, all in regulation national dress; even the little French friends, packed, like a posy of flowers themselves, into one carriage and waving with blossom hands to the delighted crowd, had been impressed into a decorum of borrowed black cloaks and mantillas. The carriages stopped in a crescent of pawing horses and gleaming coachwork, the old lady was lifted out and carried, muttering spitefully at her bearers, up to the gallery, overlooking the High Altar, reserved for the ladies of the palace. The women streamed after her, the French friends in a pandemonium of giggles as they tripped over the unaccustomed long skirts. To the opposite gallery, the Well-Belovéd marched, a small bull-frog of self-importance, in his white satin suit, the court gentlemen trailing after him with a good deal of surreptitious pantomime behind his portly back. The organ burst into the tremendous pæan of praise (of the Grand Duke) which is the Juanese national anthem, and El Exaltida and La Bellissima came slowly up the flower-patterned pathway through the aisle.

The Grand Duke had arranged for Miss Cockrill and her friends to be accommodated in the grand ducal galleries: but Mr Cecil, in hurried consultation

with El Gerente (who was in charge, under the Cathedral staff, of seating arrangements), preferred to remain closer to the scene of activities—though at a discreet distance from the thurible itself. Not wishing to appear singular, he had arranged for Miss Cockrill and Miss Foley also to be given special *prie-Dieu* beside him in an ordinarily unoccupied spot; well to one side, but in a line with the Grand Duke's own. Down in the body of the church, the poor Major, with all his troubles, was tightly jammed amidst his loudly complaining flock, in the heart of the crowd.

La Bellissima looked like a rose herself, thought Cousin Hat, watching her almost lovingly as she came, slowly pacing up the long aisle, her feet hardly disturbing the pattern of petals which, however, the long cloak swept into little ridges as she passed. Her dress was of rose pink satin, very long and narrow, her cloak of the glossy dark leaf-green of the cathedral hangings. Even her hair, beneath the heavy black lace veil, had the colour of the pollen of a rose, and round her throat gleamed a necklace of matchless pale, pink pearls. Beside her, the Grand Duke walked with his dark head bent, his chin sunk in the folds of the cloak thrown, brigand-like, over his shoulder. They came to the *prie-Dieu*, bowed to the altar, bowed to one another; and knelt and prayed. Before them, the golden thurible hung motionless on its golden stand.

From his vantage point, long ago strategically chosen, Tomaso di Goya could see the thurible. He had placed himself close to the famous so-called Pisano font, so positioned that by climbing on to it when—when the time came—he would be able to command the whole cathedral. He had noted Guido's politio stationed, as arranged, in their places, so evidently that man of straw was standing by his word: Tomaso had avoided him all morning so that there should be no possibility of his declaring a last minute change of heart. He could see him now, standing in the place they had appointed, white to the chops and staring as though hypnotised, at the thurible. He too must be despatched when he had served his turn. And Cousin Francisco, having been duly entrusted with an errand or two which would show in his disfavour when he was charged with the crime, was in the special place with which he had been 'rewarded'; when the moment came for his slaughter, they would know where to find him. He spared a thought for Loreнна, wondering which among all the bent, black-veiled heads below him, could be hers. Poor little Loreнна!—whatever the outcome of this hour, for her there could be no more happiness....

The organ music changed. All over the cathedral, the lights went out: as though the whole galaxy of the stars had been suddenly extinguished, leaving only the domed and shadowy immensity of the night sky. Only the great High Altar blazed with its ordered pattern of innumerable candles, and here and there in the darkness of the aisle and naves, more candles glimmered before the altars of the saints. In the gloom of the darkened doorway of the sacristy, two points of light appeared and then two more and two more, like glow-worms in the dark, moving slowly forward, lengthening at last into a long, double row of candle flames as the choir filed slowly in behind the uplifted crucifix, in their crimson surplices and sharp-pleated cottas trimmed with deep hems of lace. Behind them came the acolytes and altar boys, behind them again, the celebrant priests in their splendid vestments, red and white and gold for this day of roses: the

Obispo, the Arcivescovo—and El Patriarca, head bent, lips moving, bearing the covered chalice in his hands. At the foot of the altar steps, he knelt for a moment. The attendant deacons dispersed about him, the altar boys took up their positions, anxiously rehearsing their coming parts in the ceremony in their minds, the choir opened their throats and sang, full-hearted, tossing up the lovely gift of their music to heaven. The Patriarch intoned the first splendid words of the ceremony of the Mass: 'Introibo ad adaltare Dei ...', 'I will go in unto the altar of God ...'; and Miss Cockrill thought with determined superiority of nice, clean, bright, electric-lit St Asaph's at home, of the simple oblong altar with its well-starched altar cloth, of the clipped voice of the vicar, fresh from his triumphs ('That I fear, will be three and six, dear lady!') at the bridge tables the night before.

In the body of the church, packed close as matches, the people stood to involuntary attention, their arms pinned to their sides by the press of their neighbours. 'Juanita ... Juanita ...' The low hum of many voices murmuring in the self-same prayer, swelled above the voice of priest and acolyte, moving about the altar; by the time that, standing with upheld hands, the Patriarca had read the epistle for the day, it had risen to a gentle roar. It was impossible to follow the Latin, for no one could unpin his arm to hold his Missal: the rest of the Mass was familiar and they could follow it easily enough, but the epistle changes each day and with it their attention wandered, their prayer redoubled in fervour and at last in open audibility. 'Santa Juanita, margherita del isla nostra.... Blessed Juanita, pearl of our island home, grant the prayers of your people, send us a sign....' The Patriarch moved back to the centre of the altar, the deacon went up the four shallow steps to remove the great book and carry it with its attendant candles to the gospel side: and the murmurings grew and grew and grew—grew at last into a great, rumbling roar....

Mr Cecil, kneeling in acute discomfort on his rush-bottomed prie-Dieu, dragged his eyes from the thurible and looked over at the Arcivescovo who waited, across the sanctuary from him, to receive the book and there read the gospel aloud to the people. For this was the moment when, with his own attendant candle-bearers, the Grand Duke would rise, kneel before the golden censer, lift it from its stand and move forward again for the ceremonial incensing of the book. The Arcivescovo met his glance across the wide sanctuary and gave him a rather wild look, accompanied, however, with a nod of would-be reassurance. He would make his protest, he would prevent disaster, even at the cost of his life. Mr Cecil clasped two hands together in a boxer's gesture of encouragement. The time had come.

The Grand Duke rose.

But the thunder of the voices would not be stifled, they rose with the rising of the Grand Duke to his great height, towering over their heads, to an hysteria of shouting. He stood for a moment, uncertain. The Patriarch, sitting now, unrelaxed, on the Patriarchal throne on the epistle side of the sanctuary, frowned angrily. Over the general cry of 'Juanita! Juanita!' a woman's voice cried, the sibilants hissing above the rest, 'Bellissima—ask now! Bellissima—pray!' and in a moment every voice in the crowd cried out, 'Bellissima—Bellissima—ask now ...! Ask now for the Sign ...!'

Grouped about the altar, priests, deacons, acolytes, paused, confounded. But the Patriarch stood up suddenly, there before his carved and gilded throne, and held up his hand in a gesture so commanding, so almost threatening, that the sound faltered and, ebbing out and out towards the far end of the aisle, petered into silence. When the silence was complete he spoke. "Let there be no more of this! You offend against God by this interruption of His Holy Mass. La Bellissima will pray to Juanita when the Mass is ended."

"Let her pray now," cried the woman's voice again; and voices echoed, 'Let her ask now! Let her pray now ...!'

The Patriarch raised his hand again. "You are impious! Will Juanita listen to you at such a time? Be silent, let the Mass continue...."

The Arcivescovo stood, hands ceremonially held apart, waiting for the book to be brought to him; but his thoughts were far away. Fool, fool and faithless that he had been! Juanita!—Juanita would save them, how could he have forgotten, how could he have presumed to place faith in his own poor human meddlings, when Juanita was even now looking down at them from heaven, in pity for all their wickedness and folly; perhaps, indeed, had deliberately let all this come about, that through these means her miraculous sign might be vouchsafed. And indeed—might this not in itself be a sign, this intervention of the people at the very moment that the Grand Duke stretched his hand out for the thurible ...? With all his strength, he prayed to her to come to them now: offered up his life into the hands of God, if He would but send his servant to the succour of these poor, wicked, frightened, hurt and helpless children below. As the Patriarch ended and from the packed church came a still rebellious muttering, he dragged himself from the clouds of prayer and spoke. "Beatitudo, Exaltida—in humility I submit that the people have their wish. The canon of the Mass has not yet begun, there is no real interruption. Let us ask now: let the Mass be a Mass of thanksgiving. Let La Bellissima ask now for the Sign."

Once more the Patriarch's hand urgently uplifted, stilled the clamour. He looked doubtfully towards the prie-Dieu. "Exaltida ...?"

He stood still in his place, considering, a giant among pigmy people standing on eager tiptoe behind him in the darkness. His handsome face was stern and dark above the folds of the cloak. He said nothing for a long time. Then he spoke. "Very well. We will ask now instead of later." He turned back towards the body of the church and raised his voice. "Yes. We will ask now. The Grand Duchess will offer prayers to Juanita for the gift of a son: and I promise again now what I promised before: if Juanita will give us some sign that the prayer shall be answered, I will this day make application to Rome, with proof of the miracle of the sign; and beg his Holiness to consider her canonisation." He turned back to the altar, bowed, and knelt down at his prie-Dieu in an attitude of prayer. Mr Cecil too knelt, and something very much like a prayer—a prayer of thankfulness—escaped from his unaccustomed heart. The moment had passed.

The group about the altar, also knelt, the Archbishop at the prie-Dieu before his throne. The Patriarch moved slowly down the four shallow steps from the altar, turned and, kneeling, prayed aloud. "Blessed Juanita, Pearl of San Juan, hear and answer the prayers of your people, hear the prayer of your daughter here below...."

There was a long, long, long silence. Nothing will happen, thought Cousin Hat

rather desperately, and *then* what will they do? She looked with compassion at the slender figure, kneeling with bowed head, lit only by the gleams from the altar candles falling on the shining gold hair beneath the black veil, on the jewels that shimmered on the tight-clasped hands. The Grand Duchess lifted her head at last and her voice shook; and yet, in the hush of the great domed shadowy building, though small, was sweet and clear. "Santa Juanita," prayed La Bellissima in carefully rehearsed Juanese, "here before our people, we pray that you will intercede for us before the Throne of God for the gift of a son—an heir to the dukedom of our beloved island; and that in token of hearing this, our prayer, you will vouchsafe the miracle of a sign." Her voice died away. The Grand Duke said, loudly and strongly: "Amen!" A hush fell, so profound that it seemed to Miss Cockrill, kneeling rigid with apprehension in her corner by the sanctuary rails, that if a candle-flame had but flickered, she must have heard.

In the shadows to the east of the altar, and above it, something flickered that was not a candle-flame—that was not so bright as a flame and yet as faintly, faintly luminous, something that stirred in the shadows above the High Altar. La Bellissima's voice took on a new note, a note of doubt, which was yet a note of something like dawning awe. "Juanita ... Juanita, hear our prayer ..." And in the shadows, slowly, indefinitely, something began to take shape....

Slowly, slowly—slowly taking shape. The shape of a woman in the long cloak of Juanese church-going, the black lace veil pulled half across the lower part of the face.... From the great crowds came a great gasp, the sighing intake of a thousand breaths; and only here and there a woman cried out with a little sharp, yelping scream. Until suddenly, in the surrounding darkness, there was a brightness all about her; and clear and vivid for all to see, she stood there—stood there on the nothingness in the shadows above the High Altar: a little stocky woman in a long cloak and a black veil, worn like a mantilla over her dark head.

Juanita.

There was a rustling and surging of sound as with one accord the packed mass of the people forced itself, tumbling forward, down on to its knees: the clicking of innumerable beads as hands holding rosaries crossed from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder; the sighing moan of a woman here or there, fainting, unobserved, unattended, remaining pinned upright on her knees by the press of her neighbours. On their splendid prie-Dieu, the Grand Duke and Duchess were motionless, staring up into the circle of light, all about the altar the priests and acolytes knelt stricken into awe; and the old Archbishop remained, unmoving, the terrible, wounded old face raised up, lit to radiance, the face of a happy child. Mr Cecil was open-mouthed with astonishment and doubt, Winsome Foley gave a great sob and buried her face in her hands; and even the arid heart of Cousin Hat was pierced with a thrill that seemed to cut her through to the very soul.

She stood for a long time, absolutely without movement, silent. Gradually all sound in the cathedral ceased, it was as though time stood still, so intense, so mass-concentrated was the effort of the people, willing her to remain with them. When the silence was absolute, the figure slowly moved: slowly the upraised hand was lowered. A deep voice said: "My children ..."

A voice cried out sharply: "Her voice! Juanita! Juanita's own voice." From aisle and nave, from chapel and clerestory came a thousand echoes, whispering

out, almost in terror: 'Juanita's voice!'

The vision raised its hand. There was silence again. She said again: "My children ..." Now no one spoke. "My children—I, Juanita, speak to you in answer to your prayer. You pray well, daughter of France, beloved of the island of San Juan: they do ill that speak against you. To you shall be granted the gift that you pray for, the gift of a child, so that all may know that your prayers find favour in the sight of God. My children, pray: pray with me in thanksgiving to God for these His mercies..." The figure raised two hands, palms together, fingers upward-pointing. "Say after me ... Te Deum.... Te Deum, laudemus, te Deum confitemur...."

Under the bursting hum of the many voices stumbling after her through the great hymn of praise, Mr Cecil, very grey about the gills, nevertheless leaned over towards Miss Cockrill. "*All done by mirrors?*"

Cousin Hat, also rather pale, contrived a broad wink. She jerked her head meaningfully to where the Grand Duke knelt with clasped hands, his chin buried in the folds of the great black cloak. When Juan Lorenzo sued to heaven for miracles, he evidently took no chances of being refused.

And yet ... Mr Cecil thought of the evil thing hidden in the golden censer, of which only he and three others in the world had knowledge. He thought of what by now might have happened, had not this most aptly timed 'vision' appeared to them. "Well, I wouldn't know; there are miracles and miracles," he said.

And so thought also Tomaso di Goya, standing with his back against a pillar, propped up above the heads of the kneeling people, one foot in a crevice of the carving of the marble font. A lot of childish poppy-cock, a parcel of priests preying on the minds of these poor, credulous, simple fools, like a pack of wolves: salving their consciences, no doubt, with the old excuse that it was 'for their own good'; wrecking his own plans, throwing them into confusion—for the Gerente and his men would have deserted their places, who knew but what Francisco also might be displaced in the shifting of the crowd?—and not standing there, meek as a tethered bullock, to be butchered when the time came. ... He climbed up higher on the font, ruthlessly clambering over the lovely marble, braced himself against the pillar, out of the way of anyone reaching up to try to silence him; and when the canticle ended, cried out into the silence that followed: "A fake! A plot of the priests! This is no vision, this is not Juanita at all!"

A groan of horror came up from the darkness below him like the shrieks of the damned rising up out of hell. The Patriarca, kneeling at the altar, leapt to his feet, sweeping aside the heavy red, white and gold vestments. There was a scrimmage in the darkness about the font, men clawed up at his ankles trying to find and drag him down. But the light about the vision never wavered and her voice rang out, cutting as a lash, above all their heads. "Silence! Who dares to speak thus to the messenger of God?"

Tomaso braced himself back against his pillar. "If you are a messenger of God, you know who speaks."

For a moment, the light about the figure seemed to waver, there was a sort of shifting, a sort of changing; and when she spoke again, she spoke with the same voice and yet with a new voice: the voice of a woman, of an ordinary woman,

but a woman accustomed to command, accustomed to be obeyed. The voice said sharply: "Tomaso di Goya—you are insolent before God."

That voice! That voice! He shrank back against the pillar, his heart grown cold within him. How often as a child had he been dragged, one of a reverent procession, to file past the table where the saint lay in her self-imposed imprisonment, to make his clumsy, schoolboy reverence; how often had that sharp voice snapped out at him, at those about him—this same voice that now addressed him by his name, the bright eyes above the black veil piercing the shield of darkness into which he cringed. And all about him, fools cried out in awe and exaltation, 'Juanita's voice!' "A trick!" he called back resolutely. "Don't believe it! Don't be taken in! It's a trick."

The vision spoke again. "Does heaven play tricks, Tomaso? Do you not know my voice?"

"I and everyone else in San Juan," he called back boldly. "Every grown man and woman on the island remembers Juanita's voice. And this is some woman, imitating the voice, some woman from Barrequitas or Toscanita: hired by the priests, taught by them what to say."

She gave a laugh, a sort of cackling laugh: just such a laugh, whispered his heart with a sickening stab, as Juanita would laugh in those old days when he stumbled over the catechism which it had been her delight to force visiting children to repeat to her, jeering at their mistakes. But she did not reply directly. She said instead: "Bellissima!"

"Juanita?" whispered La Bellissima.

"Speak to me in your own language...."

"A plant!" cried Tomaso, over the unintelligible interchange.

She laughed again. "There are English ladies in the congregation. You will not suspect them, also, of duplicity?" She said in English: "Will an English lady kindly speak a few words to me?"

No English lady present could, for the moment, find her tongue. Just as Cousin Hat, anxious only to oblige her friend the Grand Duke, was groping for words not too idiotically incongruous, however, another voice came to the rescue. The voice would just like to say, it declared in measured tones, that it was very, very happy and honoured to address a few words to the vision of Saint Jew-ann, and certainly would be most gratified if there was some message which it, the voice, could take to the ladies of the Women's Club, back home in the United States of America....

Juanita inclined graciously. "A blessing upon the ladies of your confraternity. I thank you for speaking." She added sharply: "Tomaso di Goya—did you understand what was said?"

"No," said Tomaso sullenly.

"No. And neither would 'some woman from Barrequitas or Toscanita.'"

"An actress, then, imported from abroad...."

Juanita had had a mannerism, a jerking of the shoulders beneath the long cloak of her habit, when she was—as exceedingly often happened—annoyed. The vision thus jerked its shoulders now. She said sharply: "That is enough. You speak impiously and you speak like a fool. No 'actress from abroad' could speak in fluent Juanese, no actress from abroad could recognise you, Tomaso di Goya, out there in the darkness...."

"And no actress from abroad," cried Tomaso, suddenly, "could look like Juanita." And he shouted out at the top of his voice across the heads of the people, flinging down his gauntlet once and for all, flicking his glove across the face of God: "Juanita di Perli, Margherita di San Juan—drop down that veil and let us look upon your face!"

Absolute silence. Absolute stillness. The very stones of the building seemed to hold their breath, lest a draught should flicker a candle-flame in the crystal chandeliers. The radiance wavered about the vision, trembled and shifted: and suddenly pin-pointed her face in a blaze of light and she raised her hand and cried out, "Look, then!" and pulled aside the veil.

Mr Cecil had seen many pictures, many representations of Juanita. You could not avoid it if you spent so much as a day in San Juan. Her photograph (without, alas! the suicidal donkey) hung in every shop window on the island, there was one in each room in the Bellomare Hotel which is under her patronage; at least one, usually more, in every house. In the Duomo there was, of course, her mummified body with its death mask in white and pink wax; and in chapel and home and on the quays of Barrequetas, along the quiet country paths and at every busy street corner, one came across crude plaster statues each in its little niche, often with a night-light guttering before it under its miniature barley-sugar beehive, an inverted dome of coloured glass; always with bunches of flowers. A stocky figure, long in the body, short in the leg; a swarthy face, a piercingly bright brown eye: a pronounced black moustache.... Morning after morning, through two long winters at home, she had gazed up at him from his butter dish, evening after evening had beamed at him from his mantelpiece, her face stretched into a Cheshire cat smile by the curve of a moulded vase; day after day submitted to having cigarettes crushed out upon her pottery person, on a corner of his drawing-desk. He could not mistake her; and he did not mistake her now. It did not take the hiss of a thousand breaths to tell him that, long body, short legs, swarthy face, bright eye—this was Juanita who cried, "Look, then!" and dropped aside her veil.

Tomaso di Goya had been twelve years old when Juanita died. He had seen her many times, had filed past her body while she lay, still on her table, in state before the High Altar of the Duomo. He too knew that this was Juanita who confronted him now. No actress. No island woman with some chance resemblance—no relative who happened to have 'taken after' her. Had there existed anyone in San Juan claiming any physical resemblance to their saint, all their tiny world would have known of it: such few as could claim kinship had long ago been sought out and were held in honour. For a moment he toyed with the possibility that some survivor of the family massacre at the hands of Pedro the Vile, might have slipped away and continued a branch of the family abroad; but he knew that it was false. In so small a community and so circumscribed an area, nothing could long be hidden; and every detail of her family history was as familiarly known to her people as the saint's table-life itself. No. Reconcile it how he might with his atheistical conscience, the fact remained that this could be no impostor who hung in her radiance in the cathedral shadows, the light now fading away from her face, suffused again in a general radiance: Juanita—voice, laugh, mannerisms, memory of things past, Juanita exactly as he himself had last

seen her, just before she died.... Juanita: a saint of God, sent here to answer the prayers of the faithful, the good, the simple—who all this time had known better than clever Tomaso di Goya with his foreign travel and superior mind! Sent here by God....

The thurible! With a clutch at his heart, he remembered the thurible. In a moment the vision would vanish: and then ... The Mass would go forward, a Mass of thanksgiving as the old man had said. The Grand Duke would rise once more and stretch out his hand, and this time take the censer.... And this time, no one would stay his hand. The saint?—but she would be gone: and he, Tomaso, would be a murderer, doubly a murderer, for the destruction of the innocent Francisco no doubt would go forward and he be powerless to stop any of it. Nor would the bloodshed end there. And all—for what? Not for his future greatness: for the saint had said the Grand Duchess would have an heir—could only have meant, if the Grand Duke were within this hour to die, that she was already enceinte.... And with that promise, that message from God Himself before them, it was hardly likely that the people would accept Tomaso di Goya in the dead man's place....

All about him, sighs, prayers, shouts of joy and acclamation, hands stretched forth, knees shuffling over the bare stones of the cathedral floor, a whole great host of people stretching forward, shuffling, edging, pressing ever a little forward to be one millimetre nearer to—a miracle. The priests still gazed, spellbound, upward from the altar, the Archbishop knelt, hands clasped, motionless, with that look of rapture on his upturned face: the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess on their knees, bowed submissive heads. All was peace, all was glory, all was unalloyed happiness and hope: the vision hung above them and blessed them with all the promise of the future: indulgence for their sins, prosperity for their island, renewed loving trust in their rulers, the knowledge to hug to their hearts for ever that they, in all the world, have been privileged to hold communion with a saint of God come down from heaven itself.... And he, Tomaso di Goya, two minutes after the vision had left them—was to destroy it all.

His hands clawed back against the pillar behind him, his feet dug into the marble carving of the empty font. He prayed: 'Juanita—save me! Save me!' And suddenly, sharply—he knew what to do. If this were indeed a vision sent by God. ... He called out sharply, hardly knowing what he said: "If you are a vision sent by God—perform a miracle! Let the Grand Duke take the Cellini thurible and offer incense to you, from the people of San Juan! Let incense rise up out of the thurible, and nothing more! If you are a saint from heaven—you know what miracle there will be in this...."

Oh, dear, thought Cousin Hat: what ever mischief would this young man be up to next? A horrid, sly fellow, she had warned Winsome against him, time after time. She whispered, hissing it out of the side of her mouth under cover of a stifling handkerchief: "What is your boy friend up to now?"

Winsome, half stupefied with wonder, had been staring, mouth agape, alternately up at the vision and back into the shadows from whence Tomaso's voice imperiously cried out. "*Winsome*" insisted Miss Cockrill, "what's this all about?"

"It's a challenge," said Winsome, still staring, half in awe, half in terrified

doubt. "If it's really a vision, if she's really the saint ..."

"If she's really the saint—well, what?"

"The incense. We've—he's—doctored the thurible. The smoke of the incense will be pink. This is his private challenge to Juanita—if the smoke comes out white, we shall *know* she's a saint...."

"Good gracious!" said Cousin Hat. It was all most peculiar. But, however, there was no time to go into it now. Unaware, as Tomaso was aware, of the impossibility of anyone existing who could be impersonating the saint, she had accepted the whole thing as a charmingly Juanese fraud; another of the 'symbols' the Grand Duke delighted in. And since he and the Duchess would hardly be accepting a fraud without some demonstration if they had not been implicated in it themselves, she had been watching its progress with complacency and wishing them well of it with all her heart. And now ... Not if she knew it, was this tiresome Tomaso to be permitted to upset so delightful an apple-cart. "Mr Cecil," she hissed, "we must do something to stop this nonsense, right away."

But Mr Cecil also was staring alternately up at the vision and back at the shadows where Tomaso di Goya stood: his face a mask of horrified anticipation, as white as chalk.

I must do something, thought Mr Cecil. I must act, I must stop this thing happening. I must do something *now*. But he could not. He who had been so ready, so masterful, when there had been time to think and plan, now, caught unprepared, could only gape and stare, limbs petrified in an immobility of indecisive dread. Across the width of the sanctuary, he could see El Gerente's grey face and knew that he, too, was powerless to move. But his eyes turned to the Arcivescovo and Mr Cecil relaxed: the old man had it all in hand, had but to put up the protest as earlier arranged, and this time with a far more justifiable excuse for interference. Juanita stood, quiet and receptive, in her shadows, the Grand Duke kneeled, unresponsive, at his prie-Dieu. The Archbishop had but to rise now and say that any vulgar, material challenge was an affront to the saint, the censer should be taken away and not used....

He made no move.

More stridently now, astride the bowl of the font, Tomaso repeated his challenge. "The thurible! Let the Grand Duke offer incense before El Margherita, let her perform the miracle that she alone knows of—and I and all the faithful in all the world will recognise her for a saint out of Paradise."

The Grand Duke lifted his head and looked directly up at Juanita; she hung, suspended motionless in her shadows, and gave no sign. Mr Cecil looked frantically over at the Archbishop. He remained, unmoving, looking up with that smile of ineffable happiness, at the vision. He thought wildly: The old fool—he's looking to *her* to save us! Tomaso called again: "The thurible! If she is a saint in heaven, let the Grand Duke salute her with the thurible!" and Mr Cecil yapped out, suddenly, sharply, above the tumult of the people, "Arcivescovo! Now is the time ..."

But the Archbishop prayed quietly on. The Patriarca rose from his knees and came down slowly from the altar steps towards the Grand Duke's prie-Dieu. "Exaltida—if this is the people's wish ...?"

"Arcivescovo!" cried Mr Cecil, almost screaming, caught up in an extremity of

terror, unable to do more than cry out; and “Arcivescovo!” moaned El Gerente, caught up also, like Laocoon in the toils of fear. “Do something! Speak! Do something ...!”

But the Archbishop knelt on: hands clasped before him, face uplifted to his saint—happy at last and for ever, free from fear, free from pain, free from all earthly longings for ever more. In the hour of his exquisite happiness, in the moment of the fulfilment of all his dreams—the soul of His Serenity, El Anitra, Archbishop of San Juan, had passed away quietly into the hands of God.

In the niche above the High Altar, quietly and passively receptive—Juanita. Still kneeling, his eyes turned indecisively towards the thurible—the Grand Duke. To either side of him, panic-stricken into helplessness, Mr Cecil and the Gerente. Astride the marble font in the body of the church, crying it out for the last time over the heads of the people—Tomaso. “What are you all afraid of? If she is a saint from heaven—let him take up the thurible!”

From her prie-Dieu to the right of the altar steps, Miss Cockrill got suddenly to her feet. She hooked the handles of her large brown bag over the elbow-rest of the prie-Dieu. “Look after that,” she said to Winsome, and marched forward to stand almost between the kneeling Grand Duke and the thurible. “Excuse me, Patriarca,” she said to that dignitary who still stood, one hand outstretched, encouraging the Grand Duke, “but I think this should be removed.” And she removed it without more ado, unhooking it from its golden stand, letting it hang by its golden chain, great, lazily-glowing weight that it was, from her neat, gloved hand. “Pink incense,” she hissed in an aside, to the startled Grand Duke. Aloud she said: “I think it should be put somewhere else. It is quite disgraceful that the Grand Duke should be heckled into using it—a most vulgar idea, putting the saint to some cheap test.” She looked round for somewhere to take it to. One sharp, chopped-off cry from Tomaso, decided her. The font! I’ll take it down to the font and douse out the fire: then they *can’t* use it. The deadly thing hung, harmless yet infinitely dangerous, like a rattlesnake held up, hissing, by the tail, in her gloved hand. Carrying it carefully, people falling back before her as she went, she marched with it down to the font.

There was a crash and a thud as Tomaso di Goya fell forward to his knees. A miracle! The saint had sent a miracle: had sent this sign, from a quarter more utterly unexpected than any other, to save the Grand Duke from the destruction in store for him. The people parted, in astonishment, making way for her and, very small between the great supporting pillars of the nave, she came forward to where, a glimmer of carved white marble in the dimness, the font loomed up at her. She is bringing it to *me*! By her means, Juanita is sending it back to me!

Here the crowd was almost solid, packed densely, pressed back ever more thickly as the front ranks gave way before the small, advancing figure with the thurible. He leapt suddenly to his feet. “Give way! Give way! Move back from the carpet of flowers, let no one set foot on the path down the aisle, leave the aisle clear ...!”

The flowers had long since been scattered by scuffling feet, but where they had been there remained a sort of ill-defined pathway. But the time Cousin Hat came with her burden to the font, a passage had been cleaved by the pressing back of the crowd to right and left, clear through to the great West door. He climbed

down slowly from the font and confronted her. She was rather pink in the face from the exertion of carrying the great thing, but she handed it to him, holding it steadily. "Put it into the water. I can't reach."

"Senorita," he said, "the font is dry. There is no water there." And he looked into her face and looked at the golden censer. "There is a bomb in it," he said.

Far, far away, at the end of an interminable passage, flower-strewn, between two walls of people, dangerously close, there shone the light of the open great West door. She put out her hand for the censer again. "Go before me. Keep the people back. I'll carry it through and out into the square."

With his free hand, he made the sign of the cross. "No, Senorita; I will take it." And he jerked it from her hand, and on the golden chains, the great thing swung: and he screamed out suddenly: "Keep back! Keep back!" and caught it to his breast and, screaming, ran.... Out through the double wall of the people, out on to the broad steps into the golden sunshine, screaming to the crowds that thronged out after him into the great cathedral square, to keep back, keep back, keep back.... Out into the sunshine, down the shallow steps, over the cobbles into the blessed emptiness of the centre of the square; and there alone with his wickedness and folly, his treachery and his greed—threw himself, hugging his own murder to his heart, down to the ground on top of the deadly thing; and screamed out his last prayer, offering his life in reparation to God.

But Tomaso's friends in Naples, traitors no less to their own cause than to any other, had run true to form. The golden thurible lay, a little scratched and dented, beneath his breast but otherwise suffered no harm. And after a little while, El Gerente arrived and picked his friend up by the arm and picked up the thurible (but gingerly) and led him back into the church.

Within the great rose of the cathedral with its leaf-green brocade and massed pale pink-and-white blossom, under the silver shimmer of the chandeliers, the people had stumbled to their feet and stood, electrified, looking towards the West door. At its centre, a rose in the heart of a rose, the Grand Duchess knelt in her rose-pink gown and her leaf-green cloak and only the fire-flash of diamonds gave away the trembling of her hands. The Grand Duke, royally aloof in the presence of danger, had continued unmoved at his prie-Dieu, the magnificent head held proudly still, the great shoulders tensed beneath the velvet cloak; caged within the altar rail, the celebrant and acolytes turned backs to the vision, craning to see over the heads of the people thronging the naves and aisle. Only the dead man, seraphically smiling, remained with his fixed, blind, witless stare turned up unwaveringly to the saint.

El Margherita had not, during her lifetime on the table-top, been remarkable for her tolerance. Now, however, she waited with exemplary patience while her public reassembled itself: Miss Cockrill, a trifle dithery, stumping back to her place, picking up as she went the brown handbag which meanwhile had received scant care from Winsome Foley, Tomaso di Goya being dragged, more dead than alive, to stand with hanging head, surrounded by politio, behind the Grand Duke's prie Dieu. But when all was quiet again at last, she raised her hand. "My children ..."

Like the roar of the sea, the tumbling of the breakers against the rocks, the surge of a thousand voices beat against the towering cliffs of the red brick walls.

Juanita! Juanita! Santa Juanita, Margherita del isla nostra, pray for us, intercede for us before the throne of God, remember us, thy children, oh blessed one in Paradise....

Juanita was on her high horse again. Gone was the cross old woman who had argued, with the familiar cackle of laughter, against poor Tomaso's attempts to discredit her. She was back to the mystery and majesty of her first apparition. With uplifted hand, she stilled the tempest of their importunings. "My children—hear me!" She gestured, pointing down to where the golden head of the Grand Duchess gleamed beneath the black lace veil. "At the voice of this, our daughter, I have come to you. To her prayer, I have answered: 'Go in peace, Bellissima, Rose of our Island, mother of island princes to be....' To you, my children, I promise happiness, prosperity and peace. To this doubting one"—she waved her hand again, imperiously—"forgiveness; for him I invoke the clemency of the Grand Duke. And for myself ..." The squat figure bowed forward, humbly, hands clasped together in an attitude of self-abasement. "For myself, I ask nothing but the love and remembrance of my children here together in our island home; I ask only the obscurity in which I lived and died. Make no plea for me, my children, raise no clamour for title and honours for El Margherita. Let my memory dwell, a pearl in your hearts alone; and in token of this, I shall send you ... I shall send you ..." The voice broke and faltered, the light about her wavered and began to fade. A low moan broke from the people, Juanita, Juanita, stay with us, don't leave us; a great sigh that swept through the cathedral like a gust of wind through a forest of leaves. And, as the radiance about her faded to nothingness, like the first rain on the leaves, a little, light pattering began.... A little light pattering, pitter-patter, pitter-patter, like the new rain pitter-pattering on dry leaves; and, like raindrops pattering down upon the heads of the people, pattering down upon their suddenly upturned faces, pitter-patter, pitter-patter, silky-soft and warm as April raindrops—a shower of tiny pearls. The light faded and died about the vision, a hand moved in a final gesture of blessing—and El Margherita, Pearl of San Juan was gone. But with her going all the great cathedral, all its light and shadow, all its galleries, naves, aisle, sanctuary, flower-festooned, silken-hung, was filled with the patter, patter, patter of hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of tiny pearls.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN the blue of the Juanese evening, both the horse and Miss Cockrill had dispensed with their shady straw hats: unlike Miss Cockrill, however, the horse wore, slightly askew, a wreath of white roses. Friendly and willing, it rattled them gaily through the rejoicing streets of Barrequitas, out to the steep road leading up the hill to the Palace. Mr Cecil was convinced they had met before. "One knows its face."

"Perhaps it's the one you rode behind, that night poor Winsome went down to Toscanita?"

"I said its face, dear," said Mr Cecil.

Not that she could be called Poor Winsome, any more. Exhilarated, ecstatic, perched on a very pinnacle of self-sufficiency, Winsome Foley was independent at last—independent of Major Bull, independent of Cousin Hat, independent for ever of Trusty Spade and Hogarth and Bootsis Library and Busy Bee.... Whirling like a dervish, the mauve beads thumping on the écru slopes, she flew between the hotel and the Colombaia—so much to be settled, the Writings to be appropriated and made safe for her future translation and hers alone; the relics to be collected, assessed, valued, disposed of, the first exquisite excitement of discussing plans for the new *convenuto*—all must be ready as soon as possible for the flock of young neophytes who, from the moment the Mass of Thanks-giving ended, had been clamouring (somewhat equivocally) for admittance at the gates of the Colombaia. "It leaves one rather—alone," confessed Cousin Hat. "It's like the lunatic hitting himself on the head with a hammer. When he stops, I dare say it isn't so nice after all. I expect he misses it."

"You have another hammer all ready to hand," suggested Mr Cecil.

"A sledge-hammer," said Cousin Hat, laughing: but she blushed a little, not unbecomingly, and said that no doubt it would come to that in the end. "After all, it's time he had some reward, poor man. In all these years—heaven knows why!—he's never even looked at another woman."

Quite too dog-like, agreed Mr Cecil and changed the subject a trifle hastily. Mr Cecil had that afternoon been deputed to return the inferior opal, which in turn had been returned by Winsome Foley—to the Joyeria and try to get the money back. (Tomaso di Goya, happy and busy with Lorenna by his side, had nevertheless been not too much preoccupied to remember to deduct a percentage for possible loss of business while the ring had been out of his possession.)

The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess were waiting for them in yet another of

the lovely palace courtyards, filagreed pink marble with blue Moorish tilings, centred as usual on a water-lily pool. Juan Lorenzo himself poured the pink champagne, this time there was only La Bellissima to hand round plates of little cakes. She wore still her narrow, rose brocade dress; and the necklace of pearls. Mr Cecil was enraptured by the pearls. "They are supposed to be matchless," said the Grand Duke. He shrugged. "But that is said of all remarkable jewels. Nevertheless, they are famous in the world of bijouterie, the Pink Pearls of San Juan el Pirata." He looked at them, pale as Ophelia roses against his wife's white throat. "It must be admitted that they are lovely things," he said.

In England this season, said Mr Cecil, everything was going to be pearls. Pearls and roses. And snuff-boxes! Restoration—everything was going to be Restoration. Fool that he had been not to see it before!—a pox upon himself in fact and all that; he had neglected his Restorationese quite dreadfully since he had been in San Juan, and all the time it had been the key to the situation. London was going Restoration and the rest of the world of haute couture after it, or his name was not Cecil Pr—... Well, Cecil. (Mr Cecil's name is Prout but he does not advertise the fact.) And then that very morning, staph him if, kneeling there in the cathedral, he had not happened to glance at poor Winsome Foley staring up with her mouth open as a fish at that little niche above the High Altar—that little niche that would have done so well for Juanita to stand on if she had not been merely a Vision and no need to stand on anything.... And the Foley had been wearing—the mauve beads, of course, too dreary for any words, and the *écru* lace; but also—a jabot! A jabot! All of a sudden it had come to him, an inspiration direct from Juanita and he would never say another word against her in all his life.... Restoration! Jabots and snuff-boxes and everyone saying by-your-leave and odds-fish and I-vow and so forth; and him simply miles ahead from having practised it so long in advance; only he must get into the way of it again.... "I shall design your wedding-dress, I insist," he said to Cousin Hat. "Tremendously tailored, a green brocade coat over a pink and white dress. And the jabot of course, and lace cuffs. And instead of a bouquet you shall carry a little crystal snuff-box." If Tomaso had any left, he added; he and Guido Bussaca were selling them like hot cakes....

"We passed the Joyeria as we drove here," said Cousin Hat. "You will have to appoint a new Gerente de Polítio, Exaltida, if their business goes on like this."

"I am appointing a new Chief of Police," said the Grand Duke, a trifle grimly, "whether Guido Bussaca's business prospers or not."

Now, now, surely, suggested Mr Cecil, Juanita would have wished poor Guido included in her plea for mercy? So thoughtful of her, he added, to have remembered poor erring Tomaso, when there had been so much else to say. And yet one had had the impression that in her lifetime she had not been precisely notable for clemency....? It almost seemed, didn't it, as though she hadn't quite realised what a lot there had been to forgive?—as if she had known all along that she would probably be heckled by Tomaso di Goya and had rehearsed a little speech of pardon in advance.... And had not been able to see over the heads of the people to what was happening down at the font, and again at the West door: had not realised that her prepared speech was a trifle out of date.... Or perhaps, having had it prepared for her, had not liked to make any changes....?

The Grand Duke poured more champagne. "As to that, of course, I wouldn't

know. I am not in the secret of El Margherita's counsels." He looked up at Cousin Hat, bending over her glass, and gave her an enormous wink.

The Grand Duchess followed with her little cakes. She paused for a moment, laughing, laying a small white hand, loaded with diamonds, on her husband's dark head. "You are a wretch and a villain," she said to him, in French.

He protested. "Because this terrible old person elects to pay a return visit? What has that to do with me?" Not but what, he acknowledged, also laughing, it had been very accommodating of her to have put an end to all the embarrassing fuss about her being canonised. "And what's more, my Rose of San Juan, she was very nice to *you*. All those pretty promises; and from now on, Daughter of France, Belovéd of the Island, etcetera, etcetera, for a change you'll be able to do no wrong!" He took her hand in his own and kissed it, smiling. "See that it does not go to your lovely head."

"If it does, you can send for the Senorita Lorenna," said the Grand Duchess.

Down in the town, all the lights were a-twinkle, there was music and dancing and roses, roses, roses: roses before every picture, every shrine, rose petals scattered about the inlaid floor of the cathedral where, alone and forgotten, in its vast dimnesses, the old Arcivescovo lay, composed now into a seemingly full-length, until tomorrow should come and someone have time to attend to his obsequies. Down at the quays, the fishing boats swung idle, tied by their chins to their moorings, gently backing and tugging like a line of docile goats. Up at the Colombaia, Tartine, her precious pearl tucked away into the front of her bodice, was saying good-bye to her regulars, bound for Paris the very next morning. Lollita was going with her, Isabella and Pia-Teresa were both out of work; Rosa and Carmen and Maria and even Inez were all convinced that they had religious vocations.... Winsome, a little astonished at the extraordinary number now apparent of Innocenta's dubious daughters, and at her evident willingness to dispossess them forthwith of their home in favour of the convento, was, however, too much preoccupied with her rapturous plans, to trouble unduly about them. Already Tomaso di Goya was clamouring for meltable silver. "Surely, Innocenta, she must have used more than just this one particular spoon? Even sometimes? Any that she so much as touched will be of value now." But Innocenta obstinately maintained that La Badessa's dinner-tray had been kept for herself alone. An Abbess ate apart in the community, and that was that. Innocenta was obviously going to be rather tiresome....

Behind the wrought-iron screen of the little courtyard there was a second courtyard with magnolias and a fountain, and chairs and a little table set out with glasses and the inevitable bottle of pink champagne. Miss Cockrill became suddenly seized with desire for an interview with Cristallo, the white cat, which, in its new collar of pearls, had curled itself up there and was watching the play of the fountain with unblinking blue eyes. Cristallo appeared unmoved by this flattering attention; and indeed, once in the courtyard, Cousin Hat seemed to quickly lose interest—she was not, in fact, on the whole very fond of cats. She produced instead a small, battered, fat old book. "I wanted to show you something," she said to the Grand Duke who, at her request, had conducted her there and who was now busily pouring out champagne.

"And to ask me for something?" suggested El Exaltida.

"To ask you for something?"

"You have one of your three wishes left," he reminded her. "Isn't that why we came here?"

She considered him. "Yes: so I have. Very well, then, I'll ask you for something. I came, really, to ask for your forgiveness—for this." She opened the black book at a marked place and handed it to him.

The Grand Duke read over the two or three lines pointed out to him. "A remarkable forecast of the events of this morning: if not very comprehensive." He riffled casually through the rest of the book. "So that's what you meant when you murmured about 'pink incense?'"

"My cousin has confessed the whole thing to me," said Miss Cockrill. She unfolded the original thurible plot. "I tell you all this, under the seal of your promise."

He bent over her, handing champagne, his handsome profile clear-cut against the deep night-blue of the sky. "Of course, of course. No forgiveness is necessary—I shall not count this as your 'wish.'" He shrugged. "But when so much else has been crossed out in the book, why not just have obliterated this too?"

Miss Cockrill stared up at him in wonder. "Do you know—it never occurred to us. What fools we were! As you say—when so much is already crossed out..."

"From the very first entry," said the Grand Duke. He read it over in Juanese, squinting at it in the pale light of a hanging lamp, wrought in enamel and bronze. "When I was a girl, I delighted in jewels and pretty clothes..."

"Or, 'When I was a young fowl,'" quoted Miss Cockrill from Innocenta's original translation, now, alas! improved by Winsome's more orthodox hand, "I was happy for adorning and fine cloths; but from the time of my Arrivalment, I was no more thinking of these excitings..."

"Talking about 'adorning,'" said the Grand Duke, "the Grand Duchess has a present for you." And he took Cousin Hat's small, bare brown hand in his own enormous hand with its glitter of rings, and said, looking down into her face: "She wants to give you her pearls."

"Her pearls? La Bellissima's pearls? But you don't mean ...?"

"The Pink Pearls of San Juan—yes. It is hard for people like us," said the Grand Duke, "to give a present that costs us anything. La Bellissima wants you to have the pearls, and so do I—because we both set store by them." And he kissed her hand with one of his tremendous gestures, and said: "Miss Cockrill—do you think she and I don't understand that this morning you saved my life?"

"Oh, well, yes, but I didn't *mean* to," said Cousin Hat. She amended. "Well, I don't mean that. I just mean ..."

"You intended merely to save me from embarrassment?"

"Exactly," said Miss Cockrill.

"You thought young Tomaso was challenging me—through Juanita? You thought he was demanding 'just ordinary incense,' that is to say, white smoke from the incense? and you knew from your cousin that it was going to be pink."

"Oh, good gracious no, that was just an excuse," said Cousin Hat. "I don't think the pink incense would have mattered a bit—the people wouldn't have seen the point, and anyway, they'd have loved it. But I had to give some reason for marching off with the censer—or the Patriarch would have stopped me."

He was silent for a little while, considering her. "I see. May I enquire then—

why *did* you march off with the censor?"

It was very embarrassing. She looked at him and looked away: he was so very unpredictable, one never knew what he'd object to and what he would not. "It was just that—that I knew that you mustn't be asked to use the thurible. I mean. ... Well, you won't mind my saying," said Cousin Hat, not at all sure that he wouldn't, "that the old woman was right."

"Old woman? What old woman? Do you mean Juanita?"

"No, no—La Madre. When she said that you showed a suspiciously kindly interest in Don Isidro's welfare. I mean," said Cousin Hat, again, anxiously, "getting him a bicycle, smuggling it over here for him when bicycles aren't allowed, taking steps yourself to make sure he didn't ride it at night...."

"El Bienquisto's bicycle," said the Grand Duke, "is at the bottom of the harbour."

"Oh, the bicycle, yes," said Miss Cockrill. "I know."

"So what has the bicycle to do with my not using the thurible?"

Nothing, of course, said Miss Cockrill, it had nothing to do with it at all. And she thought of him, kneeling there so indomitably, heedless of the excitement and danger seething about him: kneeling there, motionless, hands clasped, chin buried in the folds of the great, black velvet cloak: looking up steadily at the vision, standing, as motionless, in her circle of light. "But you couldn't put down the bicycle lamp," she said.

Cristallo, the white cat, got up and stretched himself. He placed each white paw in turn before his nose and pretended to himself that the paw was stuck and he must now get as far away from it as he possibly could. He did the same with both hind paws and then turned round three times, settled back into his former position as though he had never moved, and fastened his blue gaze on the fountain again. Not until he was still as a statue once more, did the Grand Duke speak. When he did, it was to say with the deep anxiety of a small boy caught using three nibs for an impot: "You don't mean it showed?"

"No, no," said Cousin Hat, shocked. But she was also much relieved. "I couldn't help—well, just deducing it."

"Oh, of course not." He went off into one of his tempestuous gales of laughter. "A true sister of my inestimable friend, Inspector Cockrill. Worthy of Scotalanda Yarrda itself. So you deduced the bicycle lamp. What else have you deduced, may I ask?"

Well, the rest of it was mostly just common sense really; wasn't it? said Cousin Hat. "There was a new batch of La Bellissima's friends coming over, for example. You mentioned it, I remember, that night at the Pavilion. She came over with them, I suppose? As a maid or something?"

"As a lady's maid, yes. And took to her bed, poor thing, the moment she got here. The crossing in the vaporetto," said the Grand Duke, gravely, "must have upset her. Even driving from the boat to the palace, she was obliged to huddle in a corner of the carriage, her face buried in her handkerchief; most distressing." The little French friends, however, he said, had been most assiduous, it had been charming to see them so considerate of their poor handmaiden: insisting upon attending, themselves, to all her needs, giving no trouble at all to the palace servants: really, he doubted if anyone else had so much as set eyes on her. Fortunately, however, she had felt well enough to venture out for the fiesta High

Mass and go down, packed into the carriage with the rest of them. A happy coincidence that they should all have elected to wear Juanese dress that day. It meant that she could go well-wrapped up in her cloak and veil.

"And so could they?" said Cousin Hat.

And so could they.... So nice for them to be free to move about in the crowd, unrecognised, up there in the galleries; looking down from all sorts of vantage points upon the scene—and the people—below.

The only thing was, said Cousin Hat, that up there, above the clouds, as it were, they would have missed the rain of pearls? And when everyone in San Juan was treasuring one of these precious relics....

"I dare say they each managed to acquire a pearl or two," said the Grand Duke, laughing. But he had been speaking of their—their sick friend. It had been a risk, he said, taking her out for an airing so soon after she got up. She had had to go back—well wrapped-up again, of course—and straight to bed. They were taking no chances.

"Evidently," said Cousin Hat, dryly.

And for the rest, there was, of course, as Mr Cecil had pointed out, a convenient niche up there above the High Altar; not too far, oddly enough, from the gallery reserved for personal friends from the palace. And of course no one had been particularly looking up there till the vision made its appearance.... And then at the end, when attention (equally of course), was focused there and it might have been a little awkward to make her exit....

"Yes, I see," said Cousin Hat. "By that time, everyone was scrambling about for pearls."

Yes. They made magnificent pearls in Catalonia, said the Grand Duke; of fish-skins, a tremendous advance on the oyster. Economical too; and the people would appreciate that—Juanita in life had tempered her charitable outpourings with a marked degree of personal thrift. But the little French friends, he said, had had a splendid time, dispensing her greatest and last.

"I see," said Cousin Hat again.

"I wonder if you do," said the Grand Duke. He leaned back on his marble seat, as he had leaned that other evening up at the Pavilion, his great arms with their richly embroidered sleeves spread out on either side of him, his head bent, looking at her from under his black brows. He was dying to tell. "You have one more wish," he said, insinuatingly.

Miss Cockrill dithered between humouring him, and showing off. She wondered what her brother the Inspector would have done; and settled for showing off. "If you mean that I should ask you to tell me who 'Juanita' was," she said, "of course I know *that*."

"I don't think you do," said the Grand Duke. "You can't."

"Oh, yes, I can," said Miss Cockrill. She put down her glass of champagne on the inlaid white table, she sat up very straight on her inlaid white chair, she gave a tweak here and there to the good linen dress. When she was composed, she opened Juanita's fat diary and placed it on the table beside the champagne. "After all, it's all here," she said.

"It's all in the diary?"

"Between the lines: between the crossed-out lines, I mean. For example ..."

She laughed. "Once again, I remember Innocenta's translation best. 'My adhesion to

Santa Fina was from first times of childcap.' But what Juanita has written and crossed out, you know, is quite different. She translated. 'My attachment to Santa Fina *dates from the year of my Vision.*' The year she decided to go to San Gimignano, she means? When she came back with her table?"

"Yes," said the Grand Duke.

"Yes. And that other bit—the bit we were quoting just now. What Juanita originally wrote, what she later crossed out, was this ..." She translated again, slowly, holding up the book to the light of the hanging lantern. "In my youth, I was very beautiful. My uncle, the Grand Duke, delighted in dressing me up in jewels and pretty clothes, I—er—I washed, bathed, whichever it is, in perfumed waters and spent all my time in dancing, which was my delight.' And then she crosses it all out and just says that when she was young she took too much pleasure in jewellery and clothes. So interesting!"

"Quite a little study for the psychiatrist," agreed El Exaltida.

"Quite a little study for the ordinary, common-or-garden observer of human nature," said Cousin Hat. "A young girl, spoilt and pretty and pleasure-loving, and a favourite with the tyrannical old uncle.... And at the age of seventeen, she suddenly develops a violent devotion to a saint (whose shrine is in a place conveniently far away) and declares that she must go there, forthwith. Taking with her only one—devoted—companion, off she goes; and for a journey that would normally take a matter of weeks, even on foot, she takes a year, arriving back ill and exhausted—the excuse being that she had to carry home a tea-table. Having got the table home, I suppose, poor girl, there was nothing to do but to lie on it; by then she had this tiresome reputation as an æsthetic, she couldn't just go back into circulation as a bright young thing. And of course we know her to be given to self-dramatisation, so it may have come easily. But I wonder," she reflected, "whether in fact she ever went to San Gimignano at all?"

"Only the nurse could have told us that," said El Exaltida.

"But the nurse never returned. She 'died abroad.' Well, so she may have," said Cousin Hat, "but I'd love to know when."

"That I can tell you. She died about thirty years later, having lived to a great old age. Handsomely supported, I hasten to assure you," said El Exaltida, "by the Grand Duke Pedro, and subsequently by my father." But never reconciled, apparently, he said, pityingly, always longing for home....

"Of course," said Cousin Hat. "Poor old lonely exile—staying there only from a sense of devotion and duty; always longing for home. Always longing for home, thinking of home, talking of home—and talking in her own language, of course: at her age she'd refuse to learn any other...."

"So that anyone living with her ..."

"Anyone brought up by her ..."

"From babyhood ..."

"Would speak fluent Juanese," said Cousin Hat.

In the still evening, a breeze stirred and blew softly through the courtyard, trailing the scent of orange flowers. From far, far below them, a tinkle of music fell like breaking glass against the monotonous murmur of the fountain; where the little town lay at the hill's foot, a milky way of lamplight pricked the blue darkness as though the night heavens had been turned upside-down. The Grand

Duke sat with his chin in his glittering hand and looked at Cousin Hat and Cousin Hat looked back at him. "A woman who would now be about fifty," she said. "Just the age Juanita died at; just the age of the 'vision'." Brought up abroad, but brought up in a loving tradition of San Juan el Pirata and speaking fluent Juanese; financially dependent upon the Dukes of San Juan; in constant, though secret, communication with them.... A child of their house...." She mused over it. It was all very obvious and logical, she said; but it was just sheer luck that when the time came that they had need of her, Juanita's daughter should take so closely after her saintly mama.

"I still owe you one wish," said the Grand Duke, handing Miss Cockrill into the carriage; and he bowed his tremendous bow, and kissed her hand.

"I will come back and claim it," said Miss Cockrill.

"To the half of my kingdom," he promised, smiling.

"I have got half any normal kingdom round my neck," said Cousin Hat, rather crossly. She waved most lovingly to the little Grand Duchess, standing, slender as the stem of a rose, in her rose-pink dress; but she said to Mr Cecil as they clip-clopped off behind the rose-crowned horse: "What on earth am I supposed to do with the thing?"

Oh, but put it up the spout at *once*, dear, said Mr Cecil.

Above them, the Palatio was a cobweb of ice in the cold, clear starlight; below them the town was hot with movement and colour and light and noise. The streets were packed with a seething mob of people, delirious with joy, there was music and dancing and eating and drinking and laughter and singing, and the name of El Margherita was on every lip. For Juanita had her halo at last: a somewhat three-cornered affair, it was true, pulled this way and that by the preferences of Grand Duke and people and the blessed one herself; but a nimbus none the less, in whose bright light shone the answer to all their prayers. Their Grand Duke was lifted beyond all malice with his lovely wife at his side and an heir assured; their saint was above all mere canonised saints, whose superior humility would be acclaimed far and wide, further and wider than could ever have been the case had she accepted a commonplace official recognition from Rome: their saint, their Juanita, who popped back to see her people and sort out their affairs for them just as she had in her lifetime; who left tangible, if not very valuable, proof of her visit, and took care to do it all in the presence of disinterested touristi, agog to go forth and spread the glad news to the world.... Already the Grand Duke had declared his intention of endowing a shrine, pearl-studded, in the shadows above the High Altar—there was a convenient niche there to hang it on—which would serve as a focus for the veneration of thousands upon thousands of pilgrims bringing in their wake fame and prosperity for San Juan.... Already the Gerente's cousins, under the supervision of Guido and Tomaso, were busy with improvised melting pots, with price tags and tickets, with artificial roses, with snippets of as many yards of brown serge as, reassembled, would have clothed a community: with the erection of wooden booths at all strategic points—outside the Duomo, the Colombaia, the Palatio, in the hall of the Bellomare Hotel, down on the quayside landing-stages, aboard the vaporetto themselves.... And Winsome Foley was happy and Innocenta was happy and the Convenuto was assured; and Lorenna was happy and Tomaso was happy; and Guido was happy and his Pepita was happy with all her many

daughters. And the Back-Homes would be happy with their message for the Women's Club; and Fuddyduddy had had his money's worth.... And Major Bull would be happy. And Mr Cecil would be monstrous happy, slap his vitals and odds-fish, dispensing snuff to a society in rose-embroidered waistcoats with lace jabots and cuffs; not to mention monstrous rich. And Cousin Hat would be happy....

The old horse picked its genial way through the crowd, accepting an apple here, a honey-cake there. Cousin Hat and Mr Cecil, fresh from the glories of the Palatio, bowed graciously to left and right. The Grand Duke had thoughtfully provided them with a handful of left-over fish-skin pearls and these they distributed as largesse, and so won their way at last through the main street, along the quay-side with its line of sea-going goats, and so up the opposite hill to the hotel. El Gerente waved gaily to them from the gates of the gaol; an amnesty had been declared in honour of the day, and he was surrounded by a large crowd of dear old smuggling pals, recently his involuntary guests. Pepita was dispensing wine, assisted by her daughters; all except Giulietta and her familiar, Manuela, who had renounced all dreams of the boards and were up with the rest at the Colombaia imploring to be permitted to enter the novitiate. Innocenta and Miss Foley had barricaded themselves in and were frantically chopping into suitable fragments, old table-napkins which—despite evidence to the contrary—Winsome had persuaded herself, Juanita *must* have used.... They passed Tomaso di Goya with Lorenna on his arm. Miss Cockrill stopped the carriage. Tomaso came over and stood before her with bent head. She showed him the notebook. "I have El Exaltida's permission to black this entry out."

Tomaso looked very much ashamed of himself. El Exaltida should never have cause to regret his clemency, he said.

"It is El Margherita's clemency," said Cousin Hat, piously.

Ah, the good one, the bless'éd one! Tomaso cast up his eyes to heaven. What a life, Senorita, must a man henceforward lead, who had been through such an experience. With what virtue must he surround his family circle, with what submission to authority, temper his political views: with what prudence and honesty conduct his business.... And business was booming, said Tomaso, coming down to earth; already, thanks to Juanita, he was rich, already the order had gone forth to El Hamid for as many snuff-boxes per month as he could turn out, already every box in the Joyeria had been sold....

But that was not entirely accurate: there were still two or three left. Cousin Hat and Mr Cecil saw them as they drove on past the shop. They were tastefully arranged in the window, each bearing its legend, 'Mad in San Juan'; each with a large card propped up beside it saying simply, 'Smugled'; each hugely priced. Each marked RELIQUARY: and containing respectively a pin-head of silver, a snippet of old blanket—a single fish-skin pearl.

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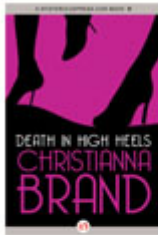
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